

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher:	OLHS English	School:	OLHS
Book Title:	The Catcher in the Rye	Genre:	Fiction novel
Author:	J.D. Salinger	Pages:	214
Publisher:	Little, Brown	Copyright:	1951

In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.

Book Summary and summary citation: (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE is set around the 1950s and is narrated by a young man named Holden Caulfield. Holden is not specific about his location while he's telling the story, but he makes it clear that he is undergoing treatment in a mental hospital or sanatorium. The events he narrates take place in the few days between the end of the fall school term and Christmas, when Holden is sixteen years old.

Holden's story begins on the Saturday following the end of classes at the Pencey prep school in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. Pencey is Holden's fourth school; he has already failed out of three others. At Pencey, he has failed four out of five of his classes and has received notice that he is being expelled, but he is not scheduled to return home to Manhattan until Wednesday. He visits his elderly history teacher, Spencer, to say goodbye, but when Spencer tries to reprimand him for his poor academic performance, Holden becomes annoyed.

Back in the dormitory, Holden is further irritated by his unhygienic neighbor, Ackley, and by his own roommate, Stradlater. Stradlater spends the evening on a date with Jane Gallagher, a girl whom Holden used to date and whom he still admires. During the course of the evening, Holden grows increasingly nervous about Stradlater's taking Jane out, and when Stradlater returns, Holden questions him insistently about whether he tried to have sex with her. Stradlater teases Holden, who flies into a rage and attacks Stradlater. Stradlater pins Holden down and bloodies his nose. Holden decides that he's had enough of Pencey and will go to Manhattan three days early, stay in a hotel, and not tell his parents that he is back.

On the train to New York, Holden meets the mother of one of his fellow Pencey students. Though he thinks this student is a complete "bastard," he tells the woman made-up stories about how shy her son is and how well respected he is at school. When he arrives at Penn Station, he goes into a phone booth and considers calling several people, but for various reasons he decides against it. He gets in a cab and asks the cab driver where the ducks in Central Park go when the lagoon freezes, but his question annoys the driver. Holden has the cab take him to the Edmont Hotel, where he checks himself in.

At the hotel, Holden attempts unsuccessfully to connect to several people. He calls Faith Cavendish, a woman he has never met but whose number he got from an acquaintance at Princeton. He at first desires to have sex with her, but loses interest when she suggests a meeting tomorrow. He also meets Sunny, a prostitute, but when she comes up to his hotel room, he realizes he just wants to talk with her rather than have sex. Holden's misconceptions and inability to communicate with women become a recurring theme throughout the book. Holden goes downstairs to the Lavender Room and sits at a table, but the waiter realizes he's a minor and refuses to serve him. He flirts with three women in their thirties, who seem like they're from out of town and are mostly interested in catching a glimpse of a celebrity. Nevertheless, Holden dances with them and feels that he is "half in love" with the blonde one after seeing how well she dances. After making some wisecracks about his age, they leave, letting him pay their entire tab.

As Holden goes out to the lobby, he starts to think about Jane Gallagher and, in a flashback, recounts how he got to know her. They met while spending a summer vacation in Maine, played golf and checkers, and held hands at the movies. One afternoon, during a game of checkers, her stepfather came onto the porch where they were playing, and when he left Jane began to cry. Holden had moved to sit beside her and kissed her all over her face, but she wouldn't let him kiss her on the mouth. That was the closest they came to "necking."

Holden leaves the Edmont and takes a cab to Ernie's jazz club in Greenwich Village. Again, he asks the cab driver where the ducks in Central Park go in the winter, and this cabbie is even more irritable than the first one. Holden sits alone at a table in Ernie's and observes the other patrons with distaste. He runs into Lillian Simmons, one of his older brother's former girlfriends, who invites him to sit with her and her date. Holden says he has to meet someone, leaves, and walks back to the Edmont.

He wakes up at ten o'clock on Sunday and calls Sally Hayes, an attractive girl whom he has dated in the past. They arrange to meet for a matinee showing of a Broadway play. He eats breakfast at a sandwich bar, where he converses with two nuns about Romeo and Juliet. He gives the nuns ten dollars. He tries to telephone Jane Gallagher, but her mother answers the phone, and he hangs up. He takes a cab to Central Park to look for his younger sister, Phoebe, but she isn't there. He helps one of Phoebe's schoolmates tighten her skate, and the girl tells him that Phoebe might be in the Museum of Natural History. Though he knows that Phoebe's class wouldn't be at the museum on a Sunday, he goes there anyway, but when he gets there he decides not to go in and instead takes a cab to the Biltmore Hotel to meet Sally.

Holden and Sally go to the play, and Holden is annoyed that Sally talks with a boy she knows from Andover afterward. At Sally's suggestion, they go to Radio City to ice skate. They both skate poorly and decide to get a table instead. Holden tries to explain to Sally why he is unhappy at school, and actually urges her to run away with him to Massachusetts or Vermont and live in a cabin. When she refuses, he calls her a "pain in the ass" and laughs at her when she reacts angrily. She refuses to listen to his apologies and leaves.

Holden calls Jane again, but there is no answer. He calls Carl Luce, a young man who had been Holden's student advisor at the Whooton School and who is now a student at Columbia University. Luce arranges to meet him for a drink after dinner, and Holden goes to a movie at Radio City to kill time. Holden and Luce meet at the Wicker Bar in the Seton Hotel. According to Holden, while at Whooton Luce spoke frankly to other students about sex, but when Holden tries to draw him into a conversation about it once more, Luce grows irritated by Holden's juvenile remarks and makes an excuse to leave early. Holden continues to drink Scotch and listen to the pianist and singer.

Quite drunk, Holden telephones Sally Hayes and babbles about their Christmas Eve plans. Then he goes to the lagoon in Central Park, where he used to watch the ducks as a child. It takes him a long time to find it, and by the time he does, he is freezing cold. He then decides to sneak into his own apartment building and wake his sister, Phoebe. He is forced to admit to Phoebe that he was kicked out of school, which makes her mad at him. When he tries to explain why he hates school, she accuses him of not liking anything. He tells her his fantasy of being “the catcher in the rye,” a person who catches little children as they are about to fall off of a cliff. Phoebe tells him that he has misremembered the poem that he took the image from: Robert Burns’s poem says “if a body meet a body, coming through the rye,” not “catch a body.”

Holden calls his former English teacher, Mr. Antolini, who tells Holden he can come to his apartment. Mr. Antolini asks Holden about his expulsion and tries to counsel him about his future. Holden can’t hide his sleepiness, and Mr. Antolini puts him to bed on the couch. Holden awakens to find Mr. Antolini patting his head. Thinking that Mr. Antolini is making a homosexual overture, Holden hastily excuses himself and leaves, sleeping for a few hours on a bench at Grand Central Station.

Holden goes to Phoebe’s school and sends her a note saying that he is leaving home for good and that she should meet him at lunchtime at the museum. When Phoebe arrives, she is carrying a suitcase full of clothes, and she asks Holden to take her with him. He refuses angrily, and she cries and then refuses to speak to him. Knowing she will follow him, he walks to the zoo, and then takes her across the park to a carousel. He buys her a ticket and watches her ride it. It starts to rain heavily, but Holden is so happy watching his sister ride the carousel that he is close to tears. Holden ends his narrative here, telling the reader that he is not going to tell the story of how he went home and got “sick.” He plans to go to a new school in the fall and is cautiously optimistic about his future.

-- from www.sparknotes.com

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s): (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

The *Catcher in the Rye* is a coming-of-age novel that explores the pressures and insecurities associated with moving from childhood into adulthood. The protagonist, like Gene from *A Separate Peace*, experiences severe psychological and behavioral consequences because of his inability to make sense of his world and to know himself. The common "coming-of-age" theme between this novel and *A Separate Peace* lends itself well to the two works being paired. Students will compare and contrast characters' motivations and reactions to similar conflicts (Reading Applications Literary 10); this thematic pairing will serve as the central focus of the unit. Students will write an interpretive comparison/contrast essay between the two works (Writing Process, all benchmarks/ Writing Application, 4/ Writing Conventions, all benchmarks). The novel will also serve to introduce students to the "Hero/Rebel" sub-genre found throughout American literature (Reading Applications Literary 11). Further literary element lessons will focus on the book's subjective first-person point-of-view and the slang style from which the narration unfolds (Reading Applications Literary 12). Throughout the reading, students will also hone their reading process skills (Reading Process, all benchmarks) by responding to literal, evaluative, inferential, and synthesizing questions.

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1

The following is from Wayne C. Booth's rationale, "The Catcher in the Rye: Censorship and the Values of Fiction:

A full catalog of [Holden's] virtues and good works would be unfair to the book, because it would suggest a solemn kind of sermonizing very different from the special Catcher brand of affectionate comedy. But it is important to us in talking about possible censorship of the book to see its seeming immoralities in the context of Holden's deep morality.

The virtue most pertinent to the obscene phrase is of course Holden's struggle for purity. The soiled realities of the "phony" world that surrounds him in his school and in the city are constantly contrasted in his mind with the possible ideal world that has not been plastered with obscenities. His worrying about what Stradlater has done to Jane, his fight with Stradlater, his inability to carry through with the prostitute because he "feels sorry" for her, his lecture to himself about the crudities he watches through the hotel windows, his effort to explain to Luce that promiscuity destroys love--these are all, like his effort to erase the obscenity, part of his struggle to find "a place that's nice and peaceful," a world that is "nice and white." Though he himself soils, with his fevered imagination, the pure gesture of Antolini, revealing how helplessly embedded he is in another kind of world altogether, his ideal remains something like the world of the nuns he meets, or the world of a Christ who will not condemn even Judas to eternal damnation. He is troubled, you will remember, when one of the nuns talks about Romeo and Juliet, because that play "gets pretty sexy in some parts, and she was a nun and all." Nuns ought to live in the pure, sexless, sinless, trouble-free world of his ideal, just as his sister ought to live in a world unsullied by nasty scrawlings on stairway walls. All of this--the deep Christian charity and the search for an ideal purity--is symbolized in his own mind by the desire to be a catcher in the rye. He wants to save little children from falling, even though he himself, as he comes to realize, is a child who needs to be saved.

Now none of this is buried very deep in the novel. I've not had to probe any mystical world of symbols or literary trickery to find it out; it is all evident in the actions and words of Holden himself, and it is grasped intuitively, I have found, by most teenage readers. Their misreadings are caused, in fact, by carrying this line too far: they often overlook Holden's deficiencies. So strong is the persuasive power of his obvious virtues (obvious to them) that they overlook his limitations of understanding and his destructive weaknesses: they take him at his word. They tend to overlook the strong and unanswerable criticism offered by his sister ("You don't like anything that's happening") and by Antolini, who tries to teach him how to grow up ("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"). They also overlook the author's many subtle contrasts between what Holden says and what he does. In learning to read these and other built-in criticisms, students can learn to criticize their own immaturities. They learn that such a book has been read only when they have seen Holden's almost saint-like capacity for love and compassion in the light of his urge to destroy the world, and even himself, because it cannot live up to his dreams.

Review #2

The following is "Holden Caulfield's Legacy" by David Castronovo, in New England Review (Spring 2001).

Holden Caulfield, that young despiser of "phonies," turns 50 this year but shows every sign of remaining America's perpetual adolescent. Immensely popular when first published in 1951, J. D.

Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* has had "cultural significance and staying power beyond its literary value," observes Castronovo, the author of *Edmund Wilson* (1985).

Like Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, and Ernest Hemingway's *Nick Adams* stories, Salinger's novel is "about a lonely young boy who thinks there is something wrong with the world, something essentially dead and phony and disgusting about the arrangement of things," notes Castronovo. But unlike the earlier protagonists, Holden has "no unfolding destiny, no mission," and not even much in the way of dramatic moments.

Turning against what Holden calls the "David Copperfield crap," Salinger made his book antiliterary in a new way, filling it with babbling and "impressions that are overtaken by afterthoughts, comic contradictions, half-recognitions, and canceled insights," Castronovo writes.

The familiar subject of lonely youth is conveyed with "a managed incoherence, an attractive breakdown of logic that appeals to the confused adolescent in all of us. Sweeping denunciations are followed by abject apologies--only to be followed by other ridiculous pronouncements." Among the many Holdenisms: "I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot," and "I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them."

Throughout the novel, Holden offers advice for "cant-free living," notes Castronovo. Be "casual as hell," for instance, and never use the word grand. *Catcher* is, in a sense, "one of the first manuals of cool, a how-to guide for those who would detach themselves from the all-American postwar pursuit of prosperity and bliss," Castronovo writes. And after a half-century, the teachings still have cultural force. "Young people and their fearful elders know that coolness is the only way. Formal discourse, sequential thinking, reverence for the dignified and the heroic: these acts closed by the 1960s. The voice of Holden played a part in shutting them down. Its tone--directed against prestige and knowingness--is as cutting today as it was in 1951."

What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

Title: **This Side of Paradise**

Author: **F. Scott Fitzgerald**

Title: **Red Sky at Morning**

Author: **Richard Bradford**

Title: **A Painted House**

Author: **John Grisham**

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Title:

Author:

Document any potentially controversial content:

The most obvious potentially controversial content is the book's language. The story is told in Holden's voice, and therefore it contains cursing one might expect from a seventeen-year-old teenage boy. In class, students are quick to point out that Holden's over-reliance on cursing reveals an insecurity to fit in and "act the part" of a teenager. Holden's curse words, while frequent, are more or less mild (Goddamn, hell, ass, etc.). The only time the word "fuck" appears in the novel is when it has been spray-painted on a wall by Holden's sister's school, and in this scene, the presence of the word so close to the school infuriates Holden and he tries to erase it. In response to the word, Holden says, "It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how they'd wonder what the hell it meant, and then finally some dirty kid would tell them--all cockeyed, naturally--what it meant, and how they'd all think about it and maybe even worry about it for a couple of days."

Holden also thinks and occasionally acts on controversial subjects, particularly drinking and sex. These scenes reflect his struggling with the "vices" associated with the adult world, and in no scene do they bring him pleasure or make him happy. He attempts to drink to be social, and in every scene, he is either ridiculed for being so young, or his behavior upon drinking pushes people away from him. He brings a prostitute to his hotel room, but cannot bring himself to have sex, instead

only wanting to talk. This scene is similar to all the scenes in which he attempts to act on his sexual urges. In each case, he fails to follow through, as the idea of sexuality becomes unattractive to him. All of this behavior serves as a characterization device. Holden is mentally unstable, and his behavior represents ill-formed attempts at reaching out and communicating with others. Throughout the book, Holden's actions and thoughts reveal a person who is moral at heart. His heroes are those who are able to love unselfishly--Christ, Mr. Antolini, his sister--or those who, like classmate James Castle, show moral courage. His enemies are those who deliberately inflict pain--for example, the boys who drive Castle to suicide.

When Holden awakens to find Mr. Antolini patting his head, he considers it a sexual advance. This scene illustrates Holden's paranoia and inability to connect, for just as it seems that Holden has met a person who will be able to help him cope, he puts up a wall against that person's good intentions.

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated ☒ Regular ☒ At Risk ☒

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6☐ 7☐ 8☐ 9☒ 10☒ 11☒ 12☒

Reading level of this title (if applicable): 7-12

Date Submitted to Department Chair: 8/23/07

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults