

The Catcher in the Rye
J.D. Salinger

Throughout the story we, the readers, slowly learn about the unusual protagonist, Holden Caulfield. The book really doesn't have any other point but to illustrate the changes that take place in Holden's disposition, his character.

In the first two chapters, Holden tells us to take everything he says with a grain of salt. He says, "I don't fell like going into it, if you want to know the truth." Holden stays true to his own veracity. He does only what he wants, instead of what he, or others, thinks he should. We first get a glimpse of his loathing of falseness. The initial person he criticizes is D.B., Holden's older brother, who lives in Hollywood us a "prostitute" because he writes for money, instead of himself.

In this chapter, we meet Mr. Spencer—Holden's History teacher. Holden goes to his house to say good-bye, as requested by Mr. Spencer. As Holden continues, we learn he has been to four schools, Pencey being the fourth. Also learned in this chapter, Holden is being "kicked-out" for not applying himself and failing.

Another victim of Holden's criticism is Pencey Prep, all-boys, boarding school, which he is failing out of. The school advertises itself as "molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men" with posters of handsome boys playing polo, meanwhile nothing like that is going on there. Readers see how prejudiced he really is. Holden also comes off rather hypocritical. He dislikes Pencey and the other schools he has been to, because they go against their personal sincerity and present themselves as something they weren't. However, after he finishes telling this to Mr. Spencer, he starts "shooting the bull."

Holden announces, in the beginning of the third chapter, "I'm the most terrific lair you ever saw in your life." This gives the reader more of questioning attitude toward what he is saying.

The main characters in the third and fourth chapters are Ackley and Stradlater. Ackley is one of the few guys not at the football, *the* football game at Pencey, making him almost a loser. What's more, he is a "slob", "with mossy looking teeth." Ackley walks around the around picking up and moving things belonging to Holden and Stradlater, Holden's roommate. Ackley makes it seem as if he's doing Holden a favor by being there. Holden starts to "horse around" with "Ackley-kid"; by pretending he's blind ("mother where are you?") and then spewing out rubbish compliments ("you're a goddamn prince"). Ackley doesn't leave until Stradlater, whom Ackley hates, arrives. Stradlater hurries into the room, needing Holden's hound-tooth coat for a date with Jane Gallagher, an old friend of Holden's. Holden portrays Stradlater as a "secret slob", good looking and friendly (phony-friendly) guy who shaves with a rusty blade. As he leaves for his date, he asks Holden to write his English composition for him.

Holden says he'll do it if he has time and Stradlater warns him "not to put all the commas in the right places." Holden becomes disgusted that he thinks commas make a good writer.

A friend asks Holden to go see a movie in town. He asks his friend if he could bring Ackley, the friend says yes and Ackley agrees, like he's doing Holden another favor. When they get back, he starts Stradlater's essay. He writes about his dead brother, Allie's, baseball glove that has poems written all over it. When Stradlater comes back from his date with Jane, Holden inquires if he gave Jane "the time." Stradlater says, more or less, mind your own business. To shy away from the subject, Holden gives him the composition. When he reads that it is about a baseball glove, Stradlater becomes angry. The baseball glove brings out Holden's sensitive, sentimental side and in order to protect Allie's memory, he rips up the essay. Because Holden is made slightly senseless by his feelings and he relates the innocence of his brother to Jane's, he calls Stradlater a moron. He then proceeds to cry about how morons never want to talk about anything intelligent. He continues until Stradlater throws a punch at him. As Holden explains, he isn't as strong as Stradlater, meaning Stradlater wins. Holden finds himself sprawling on the floor with his face covered with blood. He ignores Stradlater's attempts to help and takes refuge in Ackley's room. Ackley, by that time is already in bed and trying to sleep. Holden turns on the lights and walks around, echoing the early actions taken by Ackley. Half-heatedly he tries to take to Ackley, but Ackley is not interested and getting annoyed, so Holden leaves.

In a rash decision, Holden opts to leave that night. He packs his bags and is almost out, when he bellows his good-bye: "Sleep tight, ya morons!"

Holden leaves Pencey and makes his way to the train station to go back to New York City. While riding in the train, he meets the mother of another student from Pencey. He lies about his and tells fictitious stories about her son. We learn that Holden is not all that comfortable about lying, but he'll do it anyway. He says he takes out a schedule to stop himself from lying anymore to this woman.

Once in New York, he thinks of calling someone. However, he cannot think of anyone worth calling. So he hails a cab and goes to a cheap hotel. On the way, he asks the cab driver if he knew where the ducks from Central Park go during the winter. The cab driver says he doesn't know and pretty much keeps to himself for the rest of the ride.

Holden arrives at the hotel and goes to his room. He looks out the windows and sees a man putting on women's clothes and a couple spitting water (might have been something else) at each other.

Out of loneliness, he calls a prostitute and asks her to go out with him. She declines and he decides to go to the bar in the hotel. In the bar, at the next table, Holden gives three unattractive women "the eye." He dances with all of them and then tries to chat with them. He finds that they are only interested in finding movie stars.

The women leave and Holden is left alone in the lobby to think. His mind wanders and lands on the thought of Jane Gallagher. He reminisces about how she understood the importance of Allie's glove, how she kept all her kings in the back during checkers, and most significantly, when her stepfather made her cry.

All these sad thoughts begin to depress Holden and he goes to a nightclub, Ernie's. On the way to the club, Holden tries again with the duck question. This time the cab drive is more animated. Nevertheless, he is more engrossed by the fish than the ducks.

At the club, Holden is quick to judge the people around him. He starts with the pianist, Ernie, who is good and he knows it, thus making him bad. Then he works his way to the other nightclub-goers. The couples that surround him are "big phonies", according to Holden. After Ernie finishes his set, the whole place goes wild. Holden thinks these people are the one's who make a person with talent bad. They "applaud their heads off" and inflate Ernie's ego.

Holden orders a drink, when an old girlfriend of his brother's stops at his table with her military beau. She holds up the people behind her as she takes her time talking to him. She finally invites him to join them, he, of course, declines and says he was just about to leave. So he winds of leaving to avoid her phoniness.

Upon returning to the hotel, the elevator man asks him if he wants a girl sent to his room. Holden said yes and they fixed rates for of the "service." A girl, around his age, named Sunny, arrived at his room. At first, he really considered he was going to go through with it, but as he thought about it, it depressed him. In the end all he wants to do is talk, but still says he'll pay her. As she is about to leave, the prices suddenly change and Holden refuses to pay.

Hours later, the elevator guy, Maurice and Sunny, come up to Holden's room and he opens the door. The men fight about the agreed price and Maurice eventually takes the money by force.

The following morning, Holden calls an old girlfriend for a date. Sally Hayes says she'll meet him later for a show. Meanwhile, Holden goes out for breakfast at a coffee shop. He meets two nuns who seem down to earth and well, holy. He donates money to their charity and has a conversation with them. It turns out they are teachers and they just moved to New York to teach. One of them teaches English and Holden more or less converses with her freely. They discuss books before they leave.

To kill time, Holden takes a long walk around the city. He sees a family, mother and father on the sidewalk and their little boy in the street, close to the curb. The parents are talking and the little boy in is his own world, humming: "If a body catch a body coming through the rye."

Reflecting on his own childhood, Holden finds himself walking toward the park, hoping to see Phoebe, but instead he sees kids skating. He helps a little girl tighten her skate. He asks the girl if he knew his sister, she said yes, she was probably at the museum. Then she remembered it was Sunday, but still Holden walked to the museum. When he got there he couldn't walk in, he really didn't know why.

By that time, he had to meet Sally. He walked back to where they agreed to meet her. She was late, as usual, and then they made their way to the show. Holden didn't enjoy the phony show, though he thought they weren't as bad as movies.

After the show, Old Sally wanted to go ice-skating. So Holden took her ice-skating. They ice skate awhile, before they realize how bad they are, then go get hot drinks. They start talking and Holden proposes they run away together to the woods. Sally naturally declines. Holden calls her a "royal pain in the ass", which causes Sally to cry. He attempts to apologize over his stifled laughs, which she does not accept. Holden leaves her there.

Later that night, Holden calls up an old friend and wants to meet for dinner. His friend said he could meet for a drink. They meet at posh bar, crammed with phonies. Holden, over drinks, tries to converse about sex, but his friend call him immature, and leaves. Holden then progresses to get completely drunk and calls and wakes Sally up in the middle of the night. Because he is very intoxicated, he can't have any real conversation.

After getting thoroughly depressed, Holden went back to his house to make a visit to Old Phoebe. They talk about things and Phoebe starts asking all kinds of questions and complains that Holden doesn't "like a million things." She asks him what he wants to do with his life and he answers, he really wants to be a "catcher in the rye"-- "Anyway, 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."

Holden, whose parents were out, quickly phoned an old teacher, Mr. Antolini. Then he asked Phoebe for some money. Instead of the two dollars he asked for, she pressed eight into his hand—her Christmas money. That genuine kindness makes him cry, so Phoebe comforts him. Then he makes his way to Mr. Antolini's house.

Holden turns up at his former teacher's house, where both Mr. Antolini and his wife welcome him. As with many other people in this book, Mr. Antolini diagnose Holden without having a purpose. Primarily, he sees that what Holden needs most is education. Mr. Antolini, implies, that with the help of education, Holden will grow up to be a brilliant man.

After Holden falls asleep, he is awoken about an hour later by Mr. Antolini patting his head. Overcome by nervousness and embarrassment, Holden leaves his teacher's house under the false pretenses of getting his bags. He sleeps in the subway station lobby.

The next day, a Monday, Holden wakes up with a terrible headache and is feeling quite sick. Trying to kill time between then and when he can't go home, Holden decides to go for another long walk. During this walk he decides to move out West and live in a cabin, alone. But before he does that, he wants to say good-bye to Phoebe, so he goes by her school. On his way there, he notices obscene words written all over. He then leaves a note at her school, for her to meet him at the museum during her lunch break, and goes to wait there. While waiting he sees those words written on the wall.

When Phoebe arrives, she is carrying a large suitcase and tells Holden she wants to go with him. Startled, he tells her to shut up and no. Phoebe starts sobbing and declares she is never going back to school again. He quickly changes his mind to stay home, so Phoebe will stop crying. Even though, she was still mad at him, she agreed to go to the zoo with him. The final scene in chapter twenty-five takes place in the zoo. Phoebe goes on the carousel and tells him she isn't mad at him anymore.

In the last chapter, we find out who exactly Holden is speaking to. He is optimistically speaking to a psychoanalyst, about the future and reminiscence about the past. He says how he misses all the people he just wrote about and how he thinks he will do well in the next school.

Holden throughout the book questioned standard society and towards the end society, in a way, questioned him. He talked about phonies and fakes and cied because he was lonely. He lost his innocence and wanted to protect Allie's, Jane's and Phoebe's. That's what he meant by being a "Catcher in the rye." He wanted to stand at the ledge of the cliff between childhood and adulthood and save those who he could from "crossing-over" too soon. However towards the end, in the scene with the carousel and Phoebe, he learned that no matter how hard you try, you can't prevent the metamorphous. Holden learned that each person's future is their own and by "catching them", he was deciding their future for them.

Most importantly, Holden realizes he is not a child anymore. He discovers it might not be such a bad thing. Although he has lost his innocence, he has gained knowledge and a little more understanding.

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