

The Catcher in the Rye Book Notes

The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger

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Author/Context

Near the end of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield imagines moving out West and pretending he's a deaf-mute. He wants to avoid "goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody. If anybody wanted to tell me something, they'd have to write it on a piece of paper and shove it over to me." Anyone who knows the barest details of J.D. Salinger's life will feel a little shiver of recognition when reading this quote. After a promising start as a story writer for magazines, and with four slim, though wildly popular, works of fiction published, the young Salinger left New York City and moved to a house in Cornish, New Hampshire. Within a year, he'd built a high fence around the yard, hung up a bunch of *No Trespassing* signs, stopped giving interviews, and has never since published another book or short story.

Up until his willful disappearance from the literary world in the mid-1960s, Salinger was one of America's most promising young writers. Born in 1919 in New York City, Salinger was a quiet boy, of whom a family friend said, "No one in the family knew where he was or what he was doing. He just showed up for meals." At age thirteen, when Salinger was asked in a school interview what subjects he was interested in, he replied drama and tropical fish. It's interesting to note that throughout his childhood, J.D. loved one of the professions Holden Caulfield hates most, acting. Salinger was not a distinguished student, and was kicked out of several schools, until he ended up at a military academy, where the discipline seemed to do him well. It was here that Salinger started to write, staying up late and writing stories by flashlight under the covers.

Salinger was persistent about writing, keeping at it even while his father sent him to Europe to learn the family business, the import-export trade. After his return, Salinger made his second try at college, having flunked out of New York University a few years earlier. Not too long into his stay at Ursinus College, Salinger dropped out again, in 1939. By this point Salinger was determined to turn all his energy to being a writer, and within a year he had his first story published, in the prestigious *Story* magazine.

Holden Caulfield, who stepped out of Salinger's pages and into the conservative world of President Eisenhower and Joseph McCarthy, is widely thought of as one of the first characters to capture the restless spirit of American youth. His appearance in 1951 cleared the way for other famous young American rebels: James Dean, Elvis, the main characters of films like "The Graduate" and "Dead Poets Society," and characters in books like *A Separate Peace*, *The Basketball Diaries*, and *Rule of the Bone*.

Holden's character was many years in the making. In 1941 Salinger had a story accepted, as was his dream, by the *New Yorker*, which also had a main character named Holden Caulfield. Holden's next appearance was in a 90-page novelette finished in 1946, which, Salinger was unhappy with and did not publish, even though it had been accepted by a publisher. By the time the Holden made it into the current version of *Catcher*, he'd evolved from a slightly pathetic character to one with a very American sort of attitude, which explains, at least in part, the way the book rocketed to success. It was made a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1951, noting that, "to anyone who has ever



brought up a son, every page of Mr. Salinger's novel would be a source of wonder and delight--and concern" (French 49). The book has had a spectacular history. By 1997 it had sold 15 million copies in the USA, 60 million worldwide. It is on the banned book lists of many libraries and school districts. And it has been discovered in the breast pocket of several famous murderers, including the man who shot John Lennon.

As for the fate of Salinger, the few interviews he's given in the last thirty years have led more to speculation about his sanity than anything else. Gestures that might have suggested artistic integrity, such as when he sued for the right to declare that his books could not remain in print unless each edition featured only the text between two plain covers (no author bio or photograph, no praising blurbs), seem--after a series of lawsuits to keep his stories out of anthologies, to keep his life from biographies, to keep his work from making it to the screen--a bit like paranoia. Presently, Salinger is arguably less famous for his writing than he is for his personality, which periodically crashes forth in a new lawsuit or a bitter public comment.

When Holden Caulfield talks about his desire to be a deaf mute, he thinks that people will soon get tired of the effort it takes to communicate with him, "and then I'd be through with having conversations for the rest of my life. Everybody'd think I was just a poor deaf-mute bastard and they'd leave me alone." (198-99) citation form. If this is an autobiographical desire, it's not been realized. Salinger has people curious, especially because he's made it known that he's been writing steadily since he left the world of publication. As he toils away with his pen and paper in a little concrete bunker on his property, we can only imagine what writings, if any, he will choose to leave us when he dies.

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Plot Summary

The Catcher in the Rye is the story of teenager Holden Caulfield's turbulent last few days before his Christmas vacation. During these days, Holden leaves Pencey Prep, a boys' school he's been kicked out of, and takes off for a few nights alone in New York City. Holden tells the story as a monologue, from some sort of a mental facility where he's recovering from the stress of the experiences he retells.

Holden's tale begins at Pencey, which he despises for its prevailing "phoniness." Holden finds a lot of people and attitudes unbearably phony. It's the day of the big Pencey football game, something that Holden has little interest in. In lieu of watching, Holden takes a walk to the house of his history teacher, old Mr. Spencer. This isn't a particularly satisfying visit, nor is his last evening at Pencey, during which he hangs around with a coarse and dull guy named Ackley and later gets beat up by his own roommate, a ladies' man named Stradlater. The idea of Stradlater taking one of Holden's old friends, Jane Gallagher, out on a date, and the thought of suave Stradlater making the moves on his innocent friend drives Holden to his fists. After the fight, Holden decides to get up and leave Pencey immediately. He finishes packing and leaves campus in the middle of the night.

A train takes Holden to New York City, where his family has lived all his life. Here, he checks into the derelict Edmont Hotel, a place that provides him with several adventures including an evening dancing with three dull tourist girls and a clumsy encounter with a prostitute. Holden sends the prostitute away without services rendered, and although he pays her for her time, it's apparently not enough. For this, Holden gets his second pummeling in as many nights, at the hands of Maurice, the hotel's elevator man/pimp.

Holden spends a total of two days in the city, and these days are largely characterized by drunkenness and loneliness. He meets up with an old acquaintance named Carl Luce and has a date with an off-and-on girlfriend, Sally Hayes, but both experiences leave him more miserable than before. Finally, Holden sneaks into his parents' apartment to visit his kid sister Phoebe, who's about the only person he seems to be able to communicate with. After this, Holden feels a little better, and he heads off to the apartment of his ex-English teacher, Mr. Antolini. The comfort Holden hopes to find there is upset when he wakes up in the middle of the night to find Mr. Antolini petting his head in a way that seems "perverted."

After this, Holden gets awfully depressed. His distress with the phoniness and stupidity of the world focuses as he spends his last afternoon wandering around the city. What bothers him most is that the world seems to have no sanctuary from the phony or perverse in it anymore--it's a cruel place to grow up. This becomes all the more real for Holden as he wanders around his little sister's school building and keeps finding swear words scribbled on the walls. Holden begins to envision himself as a guardian of children, someone who will protect their innocence. This hope is crystallized in a vision of himself as the catcher in the rye--a sort of guard at the edges of a field where children



can run free and play, a guardian who can keep these kids from falling, in their exuberance, over the field's edges.

Though Holden tells his little sister he's going to move out West, this doesn't pan out. Instead, after a little fight with Phoebe, Holden ends up accompanying her to the park and watching as she rides the merry-go-round, stretching from her wooden horse to reach a prized brass ring. As he watches with a combination of fear and joy, Holden seems to have decided that there can be no catcher, that all you can do is hope kids develop in the harsh world on their own.

Holden never does give a thorough assessment of his prognosis since his hospitalization. But if his voice in the novel's last few pages is any indication, his time recovering has left him calmer and with more perspective, but still lonely and without direction.



Major Characters

Holden Caulfield: Holden is six feet two and has grown six and a half inches in the last year. He's a heavy smoker and wears his hair in a crew cut. People mistake him for being 13 even though he's 16 and has a headful of gray hair. Holden's appearance is that of an adolescent who's not just too young or too old for his age, but somehow both at once. Holden has just failed out of Pencey Prep. The only subject he passed was English, as he reads a lot on his own. The novel follows Holden's last few days at Pencey and the events that happen afterward, which lead to his hospitalization and psychoanalysis. *The Catcher in the Rye* is the story of Holden Caulfield during these crucial days, as told by Holden.

Mr. Spencer: Holden's history teacher at Pencey Prep. He is at home in a bathrobe, suffering from a cold when Holden visits him for the last time. Holden wants to say goodbye to Mr. Spencer, but then regrets his choice when Mr. Spencer grills him about his future.

Robert Ackley: Holden's next door neighbor in his dorm at Pencey Prep, he is a brash and annoying guy. Holden simply puts up with Ackley's disgusting habits and bad behavior. Ackley says he hates just about everyone, but he honestly dislikes Stradlater, Holden's roommate, and will leave the room whenever he shows up.

Stradlater: Holden's roommate at Pencey Prep. Holden calls him a 'secret slob,' because, although he is handsome and well kept, his razor is rusted and cruddy. Stradlater often walks around without a shirt on and is popular with the girls. When he goes on a date with Jane Gallagher, Holden becomes extremely agitated, because Stradlater is extremely forward with his dates.

Jane Gallagher: A girl who used to live near Holden and played checkers with him two summers ago. She danced ballet and had trouble with her 'booze hound' father.-She had a 'lousy childhood' according to Holden, who cares for her a great deal. When Holden finds out Jane is going on a date with the sexually-experienced Stradlater, he becomes agitated.

Phoebe Caulfield: Holden's younger sister, Phoebe is a smart kid, and she and Holden mutually adore and respect each other. Holden thinks about Phoebe many times during his time in New York City, and finally risks getting caught by his parents to sneak into their apartment and visit her. When Holden says he's leaving to go West, Phoebe packs her bags and demands to come along. For some reason, this seems to convince Holden that neither of them needs to be running away.

Allie Caulfield: Holden's younger brother by two years, Allie died of leukemia, which distressed Holden to the point that he punched out all the windows in the garage. Allie had bright red hair and had written poems all over his baseball mitt so he would have something to read on the field. Holden remembers him as extremely kind and intelligent.



Mrs. Morrow: The mother of Ernest Morrow (a Pencey student). Holden has a long conversation with her on the train as he leaves Pencey for good. Holden tells Mrs. Morrow a number of lies about how great her son is, even though Holden thinks Ernest is a bastard.

Sally Hayes: Holden's girlfriend, or at least a girl he's had a few dates with, at the beginning of the story. By the end of the story, she's presumably not his girlfriend anymore. Holden finds Sally cute, but a bit phony. He goes on a disastrous date with Sally when he's in the city, but is so lonely and physically attracted that he asks her to run away with him.

Carl Luce: A rather affected older boy that Holden knew from one of his old schools. Holden calls Luce and asks him to have a few drinks with him in the city. Luce concedes, but clearly finds Holden silly and immature, and he leaves Holden in the bar after advising it might be helpful for him to see a psychoanalyst.

Mr. Antolini: A favorite ex-English teacher of Holden's. Holden calls Mr. Antolini after his lousy time with Luce, and Mr. Antolini takes him in for the evening. He seems kind and concerned, and gives Holden some advice about keeping his head up. Holden flees Antolini's apartment in the middle of the night, however, after he wakes up to find the teacher patting his head, fearing it is some 'pervert' move.

Sunny: A young prostitute that Holden buys some time with at the Edmont Hotel. Holden is too overwhelmed by Sunny's humanity and his own virginity to go through with the act.

James Castle: An often-teased boy from one of Holden's old schools who committed suicide.

Minor Characters

D. B. Caulfield: Holden's older brother, a writer in Hollywood. Holden admired D. B.'s first book of short stories, *The Secret Goldfish*, but he is unhappy with D. B. for selling out to make movies in Hollywood.

Ossenburger: An alumnus of Pencey Prep and the penultimate phony as far as Holden is concerned.

Mal Brossard: A friend of Holden's at Pencey Prep. Mal, Holden and Robert Ackley go into town together one Saturday night.

Rudolph Schmidt: The pseudonym by which Holden introduces himself to Mrs. Morrow. Schmidt is a janitor at Pencey.

Faith Cavendish: A girl whose phone number Holden's gotten from a friend. She's rumored to be loose, and Holden gives her a call his first night in the city, but they never meet up.



Lillian Simmons: One of D.B.'s old flings. Holden sees Lillian at a bar in the city with a Navy boyfriend.

Bernice, Marty and Lauren: Three women from Seattle that Holden meets in the Edmont Hotel bar.

Ernie: An overly polished and pretentious piano player at a bar where Holden spends his evening.

Maurice: The elevator man at the Edmont Hotel. Maurice is also Sunny's pimp.

the nuns: Holden has a nice conversation with two nuns/teachers at a coffee shop.

Horowitz: A crazy cab driver that Holden gets talking about the wintertime fate of the Central Park ducks.



Objects/Places

Pencey Prep: The high school Holden is kicked out of at the beginning of his story. This is the third private school Holden has attended. Pencey Prep is, according to Holden, full of phonies.

Ossenburger Memorial Wing: Holden's dorm at Pencey Prep, named after a gift-giving alumnus who Holden believes to be a huge phony.

Holden's red hunting hat: Holden buys a red hunting hat in New York for a dollar after he loses Pencey's fencing equipment. The hat has a very long peak, and Holden wears it backwards, with the peak aiming behind him. He puts this hat on when he's under a lot of stress and ends up giving it to his sister Phoebe near the end of the story.

Allie's left-handed baseball mitt: Allie wrote poems in green ink on his baseball mitt so he'd have something to read while waiting around in the outfield. Holden writes a descriptive essay about this mitt for Stradlater's homework assignment, but rips it up after Stradlater complains about the topic.

ice skates: Holden's mother sent these up to Pencey Prep a few days before Holden is kicked out of school. They're the wrong kind. Holden wanted racing skates and these are for hockey. But the thought of his mother going to the store, asking the salesman 100 questions, then mailing the skates to him makes him sad about letting his parents down again.

Edmont Hotel: The seedy hotel where Holden spends an eventful night. Here he meets some women in the hotel bar and is visited by a prostitute.

Central Park Lagoon and its ducks: Holden is very curious, throughout the story, about what happens to the ducks of the Central Park lake when wintertime comes and the lake freezes.

the record: Holden buys his sister Phoebe a record he's sure she'll love. The song is called 'Little Shirley Beans.' When he gets drunk, however, Holden drops the record and shatters it.

Wicker Bar: The bar where Holden meets Carl Luce. After Luce leaves, Holden stays on and gets drunk by himself.

Ernie's: The piano bar where an affected man named Ernie plays the piano. Holden goes here for a few drinks, but leaves after he's patronized by one of his brother D.B.'s old girlfriends.

Catcher in the Rye: Holden starts thinking about the catcher after he hears a little boy singing a song: "'If a body catch a body coming through the rye.'" (pg. 115) In his imagination, Holden constructs a story and a job for this catcher--he'll stand at the edge

of a field where children are innocently playing and catch them if they get too close to the edge.



Quotes

Quote 1: "If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth." Chapter 1, pg. 1

Quote 2: "Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right - I'll admit that. But if you get on the *other* side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game." Chapter 2, pg. 8

Quote 3: "'I'm just going through a phase right now. Everybody goes through phases and all, don't they?'" Chapter 2, pg. 15

Quote 4: "I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot." Chapter 3, pg. 18

Quote 5: "You never saw such gore in your life....It partly scared me and it partly fascinated me. All that blood and all sort of made me look tough. I'd only been in about two fights in my life, and I lost *both* of them. I'm not too tough. I'm a pacifist, if you want to know the truth." Chapter 6, pp. 45-46

Quote 6: "When I was all set to go, when I had my bags and all, I stood for a while next to the stairs and took a last look down the goddam corridor. I was sort of crying. I don't know why. I put my red hunting hat on, and turned the peak around to the back, the way I liked it, and then I yelled at the top of my goddam voice, '*Sleep tight, ya morons!*'" Chapter 7, pg. 52

Quote 7: "Then I started reading this timetable I had in my pocket. Just to stop lying. Once I get started, I can go on for hours if I feel like it. No kidding. *Hours.*" Chapter 8, pg. 58

Quote 8: "'You know those ducks in that lagoon right near Central Park South? That little lake? By any chance, do you happen to know where they go, the ducks, when it gets all frozen over? Do you happen to know, by any chance?'" Chapter 9, pg. 60

Quote 9: "Sometimes I can think of *very* crumby stuff I wouldn't mind doing if the opportunity came up. I can even see how it might be quite a lot of fun, in a crumby way, and if you were both sort of drunk and all, to get a girl and squirt water or something all over each other's face. The thing is, though, I don't *like* the idea. It stinks, if you analyze it." Chapter 9, pg. 62

Quote 10: "He's so good he's almost corny, in fact. I don't exactly know what I mean by that, but I mean it. I certainly like to hear him play, but sometimes you feel like turning his goddam piano over. I think it's because sometimes when he plays, he *sounds* like the kind of guy that won't talk to you unless you're a big shot." Chapter 11, pg. 80



Quote 11: "I hate fist fights. I don't mind getting hit so much - although I'm not crazy about it, naturally - but what scares me most in a fist fight is the guy's face. I can't stand looking at the other guy's face, is my trouble. It wouldn't be so bad if you could both be blindfolded or something. It's a funny kind of yellowness, when you come to think of it, but it's yellowness, all right. I'm not kidding myself." Chapter 13, pg. 90

Quote 12: "If you want to know the truth, I'm a virgin. I really am. I've had quite a few opportunities to lose my virginity and all, but I've never got around to it yet." Chapter 13, pg. 92

Quote 13: "She was a pretty spooky kid. Even with that little bitty voice she had, she could sort of scare you a little bit. If she'd been a big old prostitute, with a lot of makeup on her face and all, she wouldn't have been half as spooky." Chapter 13, pg. 98

Quote 14: "The goddam movies. They can ruin you. I'm not kidding." Chapter 14, pg. 104

Quote 15: "'If a body catch a body coming through the rye.'" Chapter 16, pg. 115

Quote 16: "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." Chapter 16, pg. 122

Quote 17: "'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'" Chapter 17, pg. 131

Quote 18: "'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. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all.'" Chapter 22, pg. 173

Quote 19: "I kept walking and walking up Fifth Avenue, without any tie on or anything. Then all of a sudden, something very spooky started happening. Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again." Chapter 25, pg. 197

Quote 20: "I thought what I'd do was, I'd pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody. If anybody wanted to tell me something, they'd have to write it on a piece of paper and shove it over to me. They'd get bored as hell doing that after a while, and then I'd be through with having conversations for the rest of my life." Chapter 25, pg. 198



Quote 21: "That's the whole trouble. You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any. You may *think* there is, but once you get there, when you're not looking, somebody'll sneak up and write 'Fuck you' right under your nose." Chapter 25, pg. 204

Quote 22: "The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them." Chapter 25, pg. 211

Quote 23: "Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody." Chapter 25, pg. 214



Topic Tracking: Empathy

Chapter 2

Empathy 1: Even though Holden is impatient with Mr. Spencer's advice, he's not hostile. He is sympathetic about not hurting the old man's feelings by acting impatient. This is a general trait of Holden's. While he doesn't believe much of what authorities tell him, he does respect individuals almost to a fault.

Chapter 5

Empathy 2: Holden doesn't seem to find much that is sympathetic about Ackley, so it seems strange when he invites him to come along on the Saturday evening out. As with Mr. Spencer, Holden shows he's more likely to be mean and dismissive about people when he's telling his story than he is when he's actually in the company of these people.

Chapter 7

Empathy 3: When Holden is packing to leave Pencey, he thinks about his mother and how she bought him a new pair of skates, which makes him feel sad about letting his parents down by failing out of school again. Even though a lot of things in his life are falling apart, Holden's thinks of how his actions affect others first.

Chapter 9

Empathy 4: Although Holden says the guests at the Edmont Hotel are a "crumby" bunch of sexual perverts and the like, he doesn't categorically dismiss their behavior as ridiculous. By empathizing about their behavior, what it would feel like, for example, to get drunk with a girl and squirt water in her face, he tries to understand the situation rather than dismiss it.

Chapter 11

Empathy 5: A moment of empathy - consoling Jane Gallagher about her drunken step-father - gets Holden closest to genuine human companionship and intimacy.

Chapter 13

Empathy 6: Holden's empathy works against him in fistfights. He's unable to disengage with the real humanity shown on the other guy's face and as a result can't mindlessly attack.

Empathy 7: Holden has similar trouble with Sunny the prostitute that he does with fighting opponents. She looks too real, too human for him to objectify and use as a prostitute.

Chapter 17



Empathy 8: When Holden is baring his honest feelings to Sally Hayes, he shows that he is really longing for someone who can empathize with his confusion about the world. Sally, however, seems either a little too shallow or scared of Holden to provide much empathy.

Chapter 24

Empathy 9: Exasperated, hungover and depressed, Holden really needs some empathy from his old teacher Mr. Antolini. What he gets, however, is first a lecture and then a presumably homosexual advance.

Chapter 25

Empathy 10: When Holden is finally able, at the novel's end, to calm down and simply appreciate the beauty and innocence of his sister riding the carousel, he shows that perhaps he is ready to be a little less confrontational with the world. He's not yet ready to empathize with the causes of what he dismisses as "phoniness," but he may be ready to appreciate the pretty moments a little more and despise the contradictory ones a little less.



Topic Tracking: Innocence

Chapter 4

Innocence 1: Holden's agitation about what Stradlater's going to do with his old friend Jane Gallagher shows Holden's innocence and sensitivity about sexual matters, an innocence a little surprising for a boy his age.

Chapter 7

Innocence 2: Holden's response after his fight with Stradlater (he feels "lonesome and rotten") shows that he's still a pretty innocent and sensitive boy. By choosing to strike out on his own for a few days, however, Holden indicates that he may be ready for a journey that will lead to a loss of some of this innocence.

Chapter 11

Innocence 3: When Holden is thinking about his innocent and sweet summer with Jane, he happens also to be sitting in a "vomity looking" chair. This sort of tension between Holden's often-innocent thoughts and his increasingly seedy surroundings and experiences is evident throughout the novel.

Chapter 13

Innocence 4: Holden reveals his sexual innocence by blurting out that he's a virgin during his description of his encounter with Sunny, the prostitute. He's quite frank about this, as if he'd rather just get it off his chest than pretend to experience he doesn't have.

Chapter 16

Innocence 5: The first time the "catcher in the rye" is mentioned in the novel is when Holden sees a little boy and his parents walking down the street, singing a song about the catcher. The little boy seems to be in his own world, yet he is still safe and protected by his parents. This childhood innocence is what Holden seems to most long for later in the novel and what he strives to protect in others, too.

Innocence 6: When Holden tells the story about the trips he used to make as a kid to the Museum of Natural History, he's full of nostalgia for these old and innocent times. Thinking about how these times are gone forever, Holden is driven almost to despair.

Chapter 17

Innocence 7: Even though Holden has a lot to say about how annoying and phony Sally Hayes is, he ultimately wants to include her in an innocent vision of his: that the two of them might escape the phoniness and go off to live together in Massachusetts or Vermont.



Chapter 22

Innocence 8: When Holden's sister Phoebe demands that he tell her one thing that he really likes, Holden's response - that he really likes Allie and he really likes just sitting there, talking to Phoebe - shows that he's most content in the simple and innocent world of his childhood.

Innocence 9: When Holden explains his idea of the catcher in the rye more fully, it's revealed to be his vision of a protected field of innocence where Holden is the guardian stopping kids as they race towards the edge.

Chapter 24

Innocence 10: Mr. Antolini presents Holden with a vision of the man he'll become if he continues down the path of turning his innocence into cynicism. In this vision, Holden will become bitter and hate everyone by the time he's thirty.

Chapter 25

Innocence 11: When Holden walks down Fifth Avenue, he feels as if he's falling off the edge of the world every time he steps off a curb. This can be read as symbolic of Holden's loss of innocence - there is no catcher in the rye for him.

Innocence 12: All of the *fuck you's* that Holden begins to notice scratched on the walls of places frequented by kids are particularly distressing to him. They demonstrate that the innocent world of children has already been infected by the profanities of the adult world.

Innocence 13: When Holden watches Phoebe on the carousel, he's both afraid that she's going to fall off reaching for the brass ring and happy to watch his sister's happiness. He finally concludes that you have to let kids reach for the gold ring and you can't always worry about protecting them, since they have to grow up in their own way. "If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them." (pg. 211).



Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination

Chapter 1

Lies and Imagination 1: Holden, in his wish to "feel some kind of good-by" (pg. 16) before he leaves Pencey, shows himself to be concerned with the authenticity of his own feelings. He wants to use his imagination to feel more connected to the world and to his own emotions.

Chapter 3

Lies and Imagination 2: Holden's inability to stay enrolled in school isn't a result of a lack of imagination--he's a fan of good books and seems interested in learning from them. It's almost as if he has *too much* imagination for school. Though it's never directly said, we can assume from his performance on his essay test about the Ancient Egyptians that he loses patience with activities that don't seem to have a point and don't stimulate his imagination.

Chapter 5

Lies and Imagination 3: The report Holden writes for Stradlater about his brother Allie's baseball mitt, shows that Holden has a poetic imagination. Stradlater, who in all likelihood is not particularly poetic or imaginative, criticizes the report because a baseball mitt seems a pointless thing to describe.

Chapter 14

Lies and Imagination 4: A big part of Holden's trouble with movies is that they pollute peoples' imaginations. Holden seems to feel this is happening to him when he feels compelled to act like a movie character, gripping his side as if he's been shot, for example.

Chapter 18

Lies and Imagination 5: Holden's imagination isn't used just in the service of fantasies and escapism. When he's led to think about war after watching a war movie, he shows that he can also use this imagination to explore some issues with which he hasn't had any personal experience.

Chapter 20

Lies and Imagination 6: When Holden finally makes it to the Central Park lagoon to look for the ducks, he finds no evidence there to settle his curiosity about what these ducks do in the wintertime. This recurring concern about the ducks seems to be symbolic of Holden's desire for purpose and direction.

Chapter 22



Lies and Imagination 7: Holden's vision of himself as a catcher of children in a field of rye indicates that he hopes for a better fate for himself than that of a liar and a dropout. Using his imagination and telling lies is a fine survival technique for now, but he would ultimately like to have a role in making the world a better place.

Chapter 25

Lies and Imagination 8: It is unclear if Mr. Antolini really did have "perverted" intentions when he touched Holden's head in the night. When he wakes up the next morning, Holden thinks that maybe he did over-imagine things, that maybe Mr. Antolini's intentions were pure.

Lies and Imagination 9: Holden's vision of going West and becoming a deaf-mute gas station attendant indicates that his imagination is not quite in touch with reality.

Chapter 26

Lies and Imagination 10: Ultimately, Holden doesn't run away to the West. He ends up going home and becoming hospitalized, which is perhaps a big step for him towards learning to deal with the world rather than lie and imagine his way through difficulties.



Topic Tracking: Phonies

Chapter 2

Phonies 1: Holden's first mention of phonies is with Mr. Spencer. "Phony" is a word Holden uses to characterize insincere people and their language (like Spencer's word "grand"). Phonies, like his fellow students, are more interested in playing a part or looking good than in doing or saying anything honest.

Chapter 3

Phonies 2: Ossenburger is the first "phony" Holden goes into detail about. Everything we hear about him reveals hypocrisy. In his profession, for example, Ossenburger runs discount funeral parlors that take advantage of grieving families, though he stresses to the students that they should have integrity and pray devoutly. More disturbing to Holden than Ossenburger's phoniness, though, is the school's hypocrisy. None of the parading or speeches would occur if Ossenburger hadn't given Pencey money to buy a new dorm.

Chapter 4

Phonies 3: Movies are one of Holden's big pet peeves because of their fake emotions and stereotyped roles. Holden's not completely spiteful, though. He says, "I hate the movies like a poison, but I get a bang imitating them." (pg. 29)

Chapter 7

Phonies 4: Holden himself often acquires a strained, sarcastic phoniness, either as a joke or when he is upset with someone. When Ackley refuses to let the beat-up Holden sleep in his roommate's empty bed, Holden calls him "a real prince" and gives him a big phony handshake.

Chapter 11

Phonies 5: Although Holden doesn't directly call Ernie, the piano player, a phony, he senses phoniness and insincerity in his flashy piano-playing style. Holden thinks Ernie is too fine a piano player but no longer plays his music with heart.

Chapter 13

Phonies 6: When Holden sees the faces of boys he fights and of Sunny, the prostitute, both are disturbing. So in a way, he's in a tough spot. He can't deal with the phoniness that masks humanity, but he can't deal with looking at this humanity straight on, either.

Chapter 15



Phonies 7: Holden's summary of his conversation with Sally Hayes indicates that he might find her a bit of a phony, too. He shows himself as willing to overlook this a bit, however, by asking her out for a date. When it comes down to it, Holden would rather take the chance at having a genuine interaction with someone than dismiss him or her as a phony.

Chapter 17

Phonies 8: The date with Sally Hayes is drenched in phoniness. The actors in the play strike Holden as phony and Sally's phony friend monopolizes her during both intermissions.

Chapter 22

Phonies 9: When Holden is explaining the ways of Pencey Prep to his sister Phoebe, his judgments indicate his thoughts about such schools - they're phony places and their main goal is to prepare students to become adequately phony to survive in the adult world.

Chapter 25

Phonies 10: In later chapters of the novel, Holden backs off of criticizing everything as phony a bit. His focus seems to shift to a concern over how to keep the world of children innocent. This indicates a character change in Holden that has resulted from his experiences. He now sees that there's less to be gained in criticizing phonies than there is to be in saving and developing innocence.



Chapter 1

The novel begins with the voice of the narrator, seventeen-year-old Holden Caulfield, who's speaking from a rest home, where he is recovering from a nervous breakdown. Holden lets us know right away that what follows is going to be his story, and on his terms.

"If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth." Chapter 1, pg. 1

Holden briefly mentions his older brother, D. B., before launching into the story of the events that led to his hospitalization. His story begins on Thomsen Hill at Pencey Prep, where Holden stands looking down over his school's big football game. Holden has just returned from a fencing meet in New York City, which was a disaster. Holden, the fencing team manager, left all the equipment on the subway and the team never made it to the meet. Furthermore, we find out Holden has been kicked out of Pencey for flunking four subjects. After Holden leaves Pencey for Christmas break, he won't return.

Holden doesn't think much of Pencey, a boys' school full of phonies and crooks, but he's a little bothered about leaving without "feel[ing] some kind of a good-by" (pg. 16). Watching the football game, he finally gets this sensation by remembering a day when he and a couple of Pencey boys were throwing a football. The memory is vivid enough to give Holden some kind of true feeling for the place. As soon as this happens, he's off and running across the road to see his history teacher one last time.

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 1



Chapter 2

Mr. Spencer, Holden's history teacher, has a case of "the grippe" (a bad cold), and is sitting in his bedroom in a ratty bathrobe, with his bare old man's chest jutting out, smelling of Vicks. This is almost more than Holden can take. Mr. Spencer grills Holden about being kicked out of Pencey and what his future now holds, an exchange that leaves Holden squirming in his seat (which happens to be Spencer's rock-hard bed). Holden has little need for Spencer's lecture, but he doesn't want to hurt his teacher's feelings by being short or ungracious. Still, he amends the clichés Spencer tosses at him, as in this response to Spencer's assessment that life is a game and must be played by the rules:

"Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right - I'll admit that. But if you get on the other side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game." Chapter 2, pg. 8

Still, Holden listens and apologizes as Spencer tries to thrust the gravity of the situation on Holden by calling him "boy" and reading aloud Holden's response to his history exam, a two-paragraph essay on the ancient Egyptians. The response is so bad that Holden even added an apology note at the end of the essay. Holden's troubles are beginning to sound a little more complicated, too--this is the fourth school, he tells Mr. Spencer, that he's been kicked out of, and the world seems to him distressingly full of "phonies." He knows he's beyond Mr. Spencer's help and tells him not to worry. "'I'm just going through a phase right now. Everybody goes through phases and all, don't they?'" Chapter 2, pg. 15

Topic Tracking: Empathy 1

Topic Tracking: Phonies 1



Chapter 3

Holden's got a matter-of-fact and non-self-deluded way of analyzing himself, and admits that he told a lie to get out of Mr. Spencer's company, and also that this is pretty characteristic, he'll tell a lie rather than suffer through almost any situation.

He heads back to his dorm room at Pencey, and tells a story about Ossenburger, the alumni after whom his dorm is named. This story seems to capture for Holden all of the absurdities of Pencey. Ossenburger, who made his riches in the undertaking business, came back to his old school to make a solemn speech about how God helped him succeed, and this speech was interrupted when one student let out a big fart. Holden gets a kick out of this and sees it as poetic justice. Ossenburger is a phony, and nothing in his speech was worth hearing, anyway.

Topic Tracking: Phonies 2

Back in his room in Ossenburger Hall, Holden takes out a novel and begins reading. Holden is surprisingly earnest about reading for a student who's being kicked out of school, and says, "I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot." Chapter 3, pg. 18

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 2

The dorm is nearly empty, as everyone is at the big football game. Holden's enjoying his solitude, and also seems rather tickled by his new red hunting hat, which he bought earlier that day in New York. This pleasant solitude is wrecked, however, when Holden's next door neighbor, the gangly and pimply Ackley, enters the room uninvited. Holden tries to be fair in his initial description of Ackley. But the more he chronicles Ackley's behavior--how he interrupts Holden's reading by walking around the room, picks up things and puts them back in the wrong place and laughs at Holden's expense--the more of a slob and a jerk Ackley seems. Ackley hates most everyone according to Holden, but Holden accepts him to some degree and does a few small things for him, such as unpacking his scissors so Ackley can cut his nails. Ackley truly dislikes Holden's roommate, Stradlater, though. When Stradlater hurries into the room to prepare for a date, Ackley quickly exits, despite the fact Stradlater gives him a civil 'hello.'

Chapter 4

Holden seems to like his roommate and thinks he's generally kind-hearted, despite the fact that he's "madly in love with himself." He follows Stradlater into the bathroom and the two talk while Stradlater shaves with a rusty, "crumby" razor. According to Holden, Stradlater's a different sort of slob than Ackley, he's a "secret slob," looking good on the outside but with nasty habits. Stradlater wants Holden to write his English composition for him, an essay that needs to describe a single thing in great detail. Holden is not too anxious about this, but gives the feeling he'll probably do it. After a few minutes, Holden starts mock tap-dancing on the stone floor, making fun of musicals. Despite saying he hates the movies for being fake, Holden often imitates them for his own amusement.

Topic Tracking: Phonies 3

Holden gets around to asking Stradlater who his date is for the evening, and is shocked to find out he knows the girl, Jane Gallagher. Holden cares a great deal for Jane, and they used to have a close friendship, playing checkers all the time two summers ago, when their families were summer neighbors. Holden tries to tell Stradlater some stories about Jane, most importantly that she "keeps her kings in the back row" when playing checkers, but Stradlater is only interested in hearing the "sexy" things about Jane. Holden becomes increasingly nervous and agitated thinking about the sexually-experienced Stradlater going out with his old friend Jane.

Holden considers going downstairs to say hello to Jane, but decides against it and asks Stradlater to give her his regards, though he knows Stradlater won't bother. After Stradlater leaves for the date, Ackley returns to Holden's room and begins to pop a pimple on his chin. Holden almost welcomes this distraction from his thoughts.

Topic Tracking: Innocence 1



Chapter 5

It's Saturday night, and the steak dinner they serve every Saturday at Pencey is, as usual, no good. After dinner, the students go outside to three inches of fresh snow and start horsing around, which Holden enjoys a great deal. In the whiteness, everything looks beautiful. Stradlater has already left for his date with Jane Gallagher, so Holden decides to take a bus into town with his friend, Mal Brossard, to watch a "lousy movie" and get a burger. Holden invites Ackley along as a favor, since Ackley never goes out on Saturdays. Ackley comes along, but not before complaining about having to go with Mal. -This is no surprise, since Ackley complains about everyone. They intend to see a movie, but both Ackley and Mal have seen the one showing, so the boys just have hamburgers, play pinball, then catch a bus back to Pencey.

Topic Tracking: Empathy 2

After returning to the dorms and kicking Ackley out of his room, Holden starts writing the descriptive essay for Stradlater. Holden can't think of anything worth describing, except for his brother Allie's left-handed baseball mitt. Allie had written poems all over his fielder's mitt in green ink, so as to have something to read when he was bored in the outfield. Holden tells us that Allie died of leukemia, about four years ago, and that he was a great kid. Holden obviously misses him. The night Allie died, Holden slept in the garage and punched out all the windows. Holden finishes up Stradlater's essay about the baseball mitt at 10:30 and stares out the window, looking at the snowy world and listening to Ackley snore from the next room over.

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 3



Chapter 6

When Stradlater finally returns to the dorm, Holden can hardly restrain his nervous anticipation about Stradlater's date with Jane. Holden narrates this section with a lot of subdued anger and says he can't remember a lot of the details. Stradlater doesn't offer any information about the date, and Holden tries to conceal his concern. When Stradlater sees the essay Holden has written, he complains about the subject (Allie's baseball mitt), so Holden rips up the essay. Both boys are upset and edgy and don't talk for a while after this. Holden smokes a cigarette to relax and annoy Stradlater, who can't stand it when Holden breaks the rules.

Holden finally asks about the date, and isn't happy to hear that Stradlater and Jane "just sat in the goddam car" all night. Holden asks directly if he "gave her the time" and Stradlater dances around the question. This is more than Holden can take, and he tries to give Stradlater a good sock in the face. In the end, it's Holden who takes the harder punch. He calls Stradlater a moron so many times that Stradlater looses it. Stradlater is nervous after this - he didn't really want to hit Holden.

Holden's nose is bleeding profusely, and he waits for Stradlater to go to the bathroom before getting up. He digs under his bed to find his hunting hat and puts it on. Holden then looks at himself in the mirror.

"You never saw such gore in your life. . . . It partly scared me and it partly fascinated me. All that blood and all sort of made me look tough. I'd only been in about two fights in my life, and I lost both of them. I'm not too tough. I'm a pacifist, if you want to know the truth." Chapter 6, pp. 45-46



Chapter 7

After the fight, Holden tries to find some consolation with Ackley, who, after he gets over the shock of Holden's bloody face, is mainly just irritated that Holden woke him up.

Not wanting to return to his room with Stradlater, Holden asks if he can spend the night in Ackley's roommate's bed, but Ackley refuses. Holden lies in the bed and can't stop thinking about Stradlater and how he puts the moves on girls, snowing them in with false sincerity. He's still worried about what Stradlater did with Jane.

Topic Tracking: Phonies 4

Holden keeps saying that everything felt "lonesome and rotten," and out in the corridor, trying to decide whose room to go to next, Holden decides what he really wants to do is leave Pencey Prep immediately. Since he's going to go home Wednesday anyway, Holden decides he can leave now, go into New York City and take it easy in a cheap hotel for a few days. As he packs up his things, his deliberation is broken for a moment only by the sight of a pair of ice skates his mother sent him a few days ago. Holden thinks about his mother going into the store and asking the salesman a million questions (she ended up buying the wrong kind, anyway) but seeing the ice skates makes Holden feel sad about failing out of Pencey and letting his parents down again.

Topic Tracking: Empathy 3

Holden gets his money together, scrounging an extra twenty dollars by selling his typewriter to a guy down the hall, and then takes one last look at Pencey:

"When I was all set to go, when I had my bags and all, I stood for a while next to the stairs and took a last look down the goddam corridor. I was sort of crying. I don't know why. I put my red hunting hat on, and turned the peak around to the back, the way I liked it, and then I yelled at the top of my goddam voice, 'Sleep tight, ya morons!'"

Chapter 7, pg. 52

Topic Tracking: Innocence 2

Chapter 8

Holden, still a bit bloody from Stradlater's punch, walks to the train station and boards a late train for New York. He takes off his red hunting hat and, still depressed, stares out the window until Trenton, when a woman boards the near-empty train and plops herself down in the seat next to his.

The woman comments on the Pencey Prep sticker on one of Holden's suitcases, and it comes out that she's the mother of Ernest Morrow, a classmate of Holden's. Ernest is, according to Holden, "the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey..." (pg. 54) He's the type of kid who gets a kick out of snapping people's asses with wet towels in the shower room. But Mrs. Morrow seems nice enough, not to mention she's a nice looking woman, and Holden can't resist talking to her.

Holden tells Mrs. Morrow his name is Rudolf Schmidt, the name of the Pencey janitor. This is the first of a rather fantastic string of lies he tells Mrs. Morrow. Ernest is shy and extremely popular, Holden tells her. He was the unanimous choice for class president, though he was too modest to nominate himself. Holden offers Mrs. Morrow a cigarette and they both smoke, against train rules. Holden even asks her if she'd like to have a cocktail in the club car, which is going a little too far. He tells a few more lies along the lines of how he's going home early to have a brain tumor removed, and has to assert a pretty strong force of will to stop lying. "Then I started reading this timetable I had in my pocket. Just to stop lying. Once I get started, I can go on for hours if I feel like it. No kidding. *Hours.*" Chapter 8, pg. 58



Chapter 9

After he gets off the train at Penn Station, Holden heads to a phone booth, where he spends about twenty minutes trying to think of someone to call: his brother, D.B.; his sister, Phoebe; his old flame Sally Hayes. In the end, Holden's got an excuse for why it's a bad time to call each one of them and decides to catch a cab downtown instead.

The cabbie is not one for conversation, and he's put-off by Holden's absentmindedness and his strange questions. His obsession with the ducks in Central Park, which he first mentioned when he was back at old Mr. Spencer's house, comes up again. He asks the cabbie, "You know those ducks in that lagoon right near Central Park South? That little lake? By any chance, do you happen to know where they go, the ducks, when it gets all frozen over? Do you happen to know, by any chance?" Chapter 9, pg. 60 The cab driver brushes off the question, refuses Holden's offer to join him for a cocktail, and drops Holden off at the Edmont Hotel.

The hotel doesn't do much to lift Holden's spirits. The bellboy is an old man with a comb-over, "a gorgeous job for a guy around sixty-five years old." (pg. 61) And the other hotel guests, who Holden can see through his window, he dismisses as a bunch of "perverts and losers." Among those he can see are a man dressing up in women's clothes, and a couple spitting water, in delight, at each other.

Holden does, however, find these strange behaviors fascinating; he thinks that squirting water at a girl might be fun, though he'd feel "crumby" doing it. This speaks to his more general trouble with girls, his trouble reconciling his heart, his body and his head.

"Sometimes I can think of very crumby stuff I wouldn't mind doing if the opportunity came up. I can even see how it might be quite a lot of fun, in a crumby way, and if you were both sort of drunk and all, to get a girl and squirt water or something all over each other's face. The thing is, though, I don't like the idea. It stinks, if you analyze it."
Chapter 9, pg. 62

Topic Tracking: Empathy 4

All bound up now, Holden sits down, smokes a few cigarettes, and decides to call Faith Cavendish, a woman a guy from Princeton said "didn't mind doing it once in a while...." (pg. 63) She's angry to be bugged by a stranger in the middle of the night, but warms up after a bit. She won't, however, agree to have drinks with him that night and Holden, who needs some instant satisfaction more than anything else, turns down her offer to meet for drinks the next day. Holden instantly regrets turning her down.



Chapter 10

Holden thinks about calling his younger sister Phoebe again, and tells a little bit about her. She's skinny and smart beyond her years, and Holden obviously loves her. But he again decides not to call, and changes his shirt before hitting the hotel bar.

Holden finds some girls in the hotel's Lavender Room. Bernice, Marty and Laverne are three pretty dull women, all about thirty years old. They're visiting from Seattle, hoping against the odds to see some famous New Yorker walk into the dumpy little hotel bar. Holden, in the mood to dance, finally gets Bernice, the blonde and the best looking of the three, out on the dance floor. Bernice does a good job cutting the rug, despite the terrible band. Eventually all three women dance with Holden, and he spends the rest of the evening at their table, sucking down cokes (because the waiter refuses to serve him a drink) and trying to get the women to talk. They know he's young, and make little show about even being civil to him. In the end, he buys them a bunch of drinks and gets left in the bar, without girls and without drinks, the two things anyone needs, Holden says, to survive a night in a crappy hotel bar.



Chapter 11

On his way back through the hotel lobby, Holden gets Jane Gallagher on his mind again. They met, Holden says, when they lived next door in Maine one summer, and the two of them used to play golf and checkers together. While he won't describe her as conventionally beautiful, Holden is obviously smitten. He seems particularly fixated on her mouth, and he seems to have a general fondness for Jane's mind and sensibilities. They haven't, Holden is quick to mention, even necked, though they did come close one time, when Jane broke down over her booze-hound step-father, Mr. Cudahy, and Holden was driven to console her with kisses, though none on those famous lips.

Topic Tracking: Empathy 5

Jane and Holden seem to have had, from Holden's description of things, a sweet relationship, with a good bit of hand-holding and mutual respect. So sitting as he now is, in a "vomity-looking" chair in the lobby of a seedy hotel, thinking about Stradlater giving his old friend "the time," Holden is nearly overwhelmed with depression. He decides to head out to a piano club his brother D.B. used to frequent, though even the possibly authentic pleasure of a piano bar leaves a bad taste in Holden's mouth. He says of Ernie, the player there,

"He's so good he's almost corny, in fact. I don't exactly know what I mean by that, but I mean it. I certainly like to hear him play, but sometimes you feel like turning his goddam piano over. I think it's because sometimes when he plays, he sounds like the kind of guy that won't talk to you unless you're a big shot." Chapter 11, pg. 80

Topic Tracking: Innocence 3

Topic Tracking: Phonies 5



Chapter 12

Finally, Holden gets someone to respond to his inquiry about the fate of the ducks on the Central Park lagoon when it freezes. The response comes from Horowitz, the cab driver who takes Holden to the piano bar, a guy Holden aptly describes as "touchy." Horowitz actually gets hung up on what happens to the *fish* of the lagoon, approaching a sort of mania about the subject that leaves Holden as depressed as ever.

When Holden arrives at Ernie's, he finds it full of "prep school jerks and college jerks" (pg. 83), and Ernie's piano playing, flashy and melodramatic, leaves the jerks swooning with admiration and Holden choking with his usual contempt and despair. He gets stuck at the worst table in the joint, a situation somewhat eased by the fact that he can at least get served a stiff drink here. Holden gives his running commentary on the boring, dreadful conversations happening all around him, and is smoking and drinking up a rather lonely storm until one of his brother D.B.'s old flings, Lillian Simmons, recognizes him and strikes up a conversation. The conversation isn't particularly satisfying, and Holden declines an invitation to join Lillian and her Navy guy date. He says he has to leave, and goes.



Chapter 13

Holden, who's tired of taxi cabs, walks all forty-one blocks back to his hotel. His hands are freezing because his gloves were stolen by some Pencey boy, a fact that leads him through some pretty honest meditation upon his own "yellowness." Holden is unwilling to throw a fist over much of anything, though he doesn't think this is purely cowardice.

"I hate fist fights. I don't mind getting hit so much- - although I'm not crazy about it, naturally - but what scares me most in a fist fight is the guy's face. I can't stand looking at the other guy's face, is my trouble. It wouldn't be so bad if you could both be blindfolded or something. It's a funny kind of yellowness, when you come to think of it, but it's yellowness, all right. I'm not kidding myself." Chapter 13, pg. 90

Topic Tracking: Empathy 6

It's quite late at this point, and Holden steers away from the bars and is almost safely back in his room when the elevator man asks him if he's interested "in a little tail t'night?" (pg. 91) It's been a bad and lonely night, so Holden says yes, an answer he soon regrets. It's at this point that he blurts out what's pretty clear from his behavior: "If you want to know the truth, I'm a virgin. I really am. I've had quite a few opportunities to lose my virginity and all, but I've never got around to it yet." Chapter 13, pg. 92

Topic Tracking: Innocence 4

His chance comes in the form of a pretty-enough young girl, but she is more a girl than a prostitute to Holden. Within moments of her arrival it's pretty obvious that he's not going to take her to bed. She's not much for his nervous small talk, and when he asks her name she rolls her eyes and tells him "Sunny".

Holden resorts to his favorite coping mechanism - lying - and tells Sunny he's just had a major operation on his clavichord. Sunny puts on her best sell, climbing on Holden's lap and whispering in his ear, but this only makes him more nervous. In the end, he pays her for services-not-rendered, and she leaves, though not before making a stink that he owes her five more dollars and dismissing him as a "crumb-bum." Again, Holden's a little haunted by humanity.

"She was a pretty spooky kid. Even with that little bitty voice she had, she could sort of scare you a little bit. If she'd been a big old prostitute, with a lot of makeup on her face and all, she wouldn't have been half as spooky." Chapter 13, pg. 98

Topic Tracking: Empathy 7

Topic Tracking: Phonies 6



Chapter 14

It's been a truly rotten night for Holden. Sitting in his dumpy room, smoking cigarettes, Holden tries to find a little consolation by talking to Allie, his dead brother. This turns into an attempt at prayer, though Holden is "sort of an atheist" (pg. 99), and can't really muster the proper enthusiasm. At any rate, all this comes to a sharp end with a knock at the door.

Holden, who's nervous and in his pajamas, opens the door to find Sunny and Maurice, the elevator man/pimp. They've come for their five bucks, which Holden, on principle, really does not want to fork over. Old Maurice keeps calling Holden "chief," and finally gets up in Holden's face, first giving him a sharp flick of his finger on the vulnerable part of his pajama pants, and then a solid slug in the stomach. They take the five dollars from Holden's wallet and leave him writhing on the floor. It feels rotten, but Holden can't resist the opportunity to pretend he's a wounded character in the movies, struggling to cover his gaping bullet wound and avenge this own wound with the help of an automatic weapon. This imagination is hardly his own: "The goddam movies. They can ruin you. I'm not kidding." Chapter 14, pg. 104

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 4

After a bath, Holden finally gets into bed. It's been a colossally bad first day of vacation. So bad, Holden says, he almost feels like killing himself.



Chapter 15

Holden wakes up hungry and lonely, and decides to give Sally Hayes a call. Sally's no Jane, and he's immediately annoyed when she uses the phony word "grand," and begins telling him about all the boys who are desperately hoping to take her on a date. But Sally's a girl and she's good-looking, so Holden sets up a date. They'll meet downtown that afternoon and catch a show.

Topic Tracking: Phonies 7

Holden's got some time to kill, so he stows his bags in a locker at the train station and heads off for some breakfast. Holden says he's skinny because he's not fond of eating much besides an occasional Swiss cheese sandwich and a malted milk. Today, however, he orders a big greasy breakfast at a sandwich bar. While he's eating, two nuns come in and approach the counter. When they set down their cheap suitcases, Holden is off into a new fit of worries. He says even something as minor as the sight of cheap suitcases can make him dislike a person, and he tells the story of one of his old roommates who fell into this category.

Despite their suitcases, Holden likes these nuns. They're schoolteachers, and Holden spends some time talking with one who teaches English about literature, especially *Romeo and Juliet*. Holden's analysis of the play is consistent with his habit of siding with the little guy and despising the expected reaction. His favorite character, he says, is Mercutio, and he pretty much hates Romeo.

Before the nuns leave, Holden gives them ten dollars in the name of charity. He's glad to have escaped without being hit with a bunch of preaching and sermonizing.



Chapter 16

With two hours to kill until his date with Sally, Holden takes off in search of a record he wants to buy for his little sister Phoebe. It's not a great day for walking - it's still pretty cold - though Holden sees one thing he thinks is worth relating. It's a mother and father and a little kid, walking down the street. They look a little poor, though happy, and the boy is walking a little to the side of them, out on the edge of the street, and he's singing. The song is simple, just the same phrase repeated: "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." Chapter 16, pg. 115 This is the first direct mention of the catcher in the rye. Something about the scene and the song lift Holden's spirits for a bit.

Topic Tracking: Innocence 5

Holden gets tickets for a play, though he can't resist a little rail on actors, who are among the biggest phonies around. He also finds a copy of the record he wants for Phoebe, called "Little Shirley Beans". With the record in hand, he heads to Central Park, hoping to find Phoebe roller skating so he can give her the present.

In the park, Phoebe's nowhere to be found, although Holden does strike up a conversation with another little girl, who suggests he look at the museum with the Indians in it. Holden sets off in the direction of the Museum of Natural History, thinking the whole time about the field trips he took there as a kid, times when everything was sweet and innocent, and the museum never seemed to change. Holden is really moved thinking about all this, and says,

"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." Chapter 16, pg. 122

By the time he gets to the museum, he's gone from fond nostalgia to despair over change that's so strong he can't even make himself go inside.

Topic Tracking: Innocence 6



Chapter 17

Holden's still a little early for his date, so he heads into their meeting spot and girl-watches until his date arrives. Sally looks good, and Holden, spontaneous as ever, feels like marrying her right then and there. The two take a cab to the theater, making out a bit on the way, and Holden even tells Sally he loves her. She says the same, though also advises him, in the same breath, to get a more stylish haircut.

The play more or less gets on Holden's nerves, though he seems interested in articulating why the actors don't please him. They're like Ernie, the piano player in the Village, he says--so good that they've started showing off instead of doing their job in a genuine and heartfelt way. What makes the whole experience worse is the appearance of some phony friend of Sally's who captures her attention during both intermissions. The two of them name-drop and ignore Holden's presence. By the time they get in the cab after the show, Holden has grown to "sort of hate old Sally...." (pg. 128)

Topic Tracking: Phonies 8

There seems to be a chance that the evening will be salvaged, for Sally asks Holden if he wants to continue the date with a little ice skating at Rockefeller Center. Sally's up for this mainly so that she can wear her short little ice-skating skirt. She looks stylish at least while she's falling down all over the place. She and Holden spend most of the time on their rear ends, and they finally cut the torture and go inside for a drink.

Their conversation is in the typical superficial rut at first, though Holden, presumably exasperated with all this phoniness, finally bursts out and asks Sally if she ever gets fed up, whether she hates school. Sally is a clear fence-rider, a complainer but one who's not up for breaking any rules. As Holden, excited to finally vent some of his exasperation, gets crazier, louder and more critical, she gets more and more uncomfortable. Holden gives his clearest condemnation of boys' 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." Chapter 17, pg. 131

Holden goes on, to Sally's horror, and gets so worked up that he invites her to flee with him to Massachusetts or Vermont. This is the last thing in the world that the budding socialite Sally is interested in, though she tries to let Holden, who seems to be acting a bit the madman, down softly. Holden is confrontational enough, however, that she loses her manners, too. Finally, they're about to leave and Holden tells Sally that she's a royal pain in the ass. This seals his fate, and he's soon out on the street, having left his date to find her own way home.



Topic Tracking: Empathy 8
Topic Tracking: Innocence 7



Chapter 18

Despite his blow-up with Sally, Holden's still in search of some human companionship. He calls Jane, but doesn't get an answer, then he calls Carl Luce, "one of these very intellectual guys..." (pg. 136) Carl Luce seems surprised to hear from Holden, though he agrees to meet later for a drink.

Holden, out of what he says is boredom but is beginning to feel like a tendency toward self-punishment, passes the time with a movie at Radio City. There's a live show before the movie, which makes Holden sick and leads him into another long rant about the movies. When it's over, he sets off on foot for the Wicker Bar, where he's meeting Carl Luce. As he walks, he thinks about war, as he's just seen a war movie. Holden says his brother D.B. fought in the war, and that D.B. didn't think much of it at all. Holden shares D.B.'s opinion, he's got what he'd call "yellowness" in this respect, too. If there's ever another war, Holden says, "they better just take me out and stick me in front of a firing squad." (pg. 141)

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 5



Chapter 19

The Wicker Bar is a pompous place that normally features two French girls singing dirty songs, though the girls don't seem to be there when Holden arrives to meet Carl Luce. Carl, who is a bit older and certainly considers himself in another planet than Holden as far as wisdom goes, comes across as a pretty stiff and snobby guy. He drinks extra-dry martinis and dismisses most of Holden's attempts at conversation, which are admittedly a bit juvenile. Holden is particularly agitated about sex in this scene, and has his first bout of homophobia, calling gay men "flits." Carl Luce apparently knows some things about girls and sex. He says, for instance, he's currently dating a foreign sculptress in her late thirties. Holden keeps trying to get some details out of him. Carl Luce refuses to answer these "typical Caulfield questions..." (pg. 146) When Holden tries to be honest and explain how the problem with his sex life is that he can't get turned on by a girl unless he really likes her, Carl advises he go to a psychoanalyst. Luce's father is a psychoanalyst, and apparently Carl has made this suggestion before.

Not surprisingly, Luce leaves when he feels he's stayed his obligatory time, even though Holden practically begs him to stay.



Chapter 20

With Luce gone, Holden turns to his drinks and before long is quite drunk. Valencia, the singer who's replaced the French girls, belts out a few tunes, and Holden first gets dramatic, doing his bullet-in-the-guts routine, then a little maudlin, wanting to get a girl on the phone. He staggers out of the bar and calls Sally, who is surprisingly nice and patient with Holden, who last left her to find her own way home from the ice skating rink. Holden is rambling and slurring, though, and Sally ultimately hangs up on him.

Holden's next stop is the bathroom, where he tries to get his wits back by dunking his head in a sinkful of ice cold water. The piano player from the bar comes in, combs his hair and shakes off Holden's kiss-up compliments.

The piano player advises Holden to go home, but Holden doesn't really have anywhere to go. He leaves the bar and heads in the direction of Central Park, to investigate the lagoon for traces of the ducks. The ice water obviously hasn't sobered Holden up fully. He has a terrifically hard time finding the lagoon, even though he's lived in New York all his life and knows the park like the back of his hand. He drops Phoebe's record on the way, breaking it into a bunch of tiny pieces. The pond is partly frozen, and although Holden does a thorough investigation, nearly falling into the water a few times, there are no ducks to be found.

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 6

Sitting on a park bench, his wet hair frozen solid, Holden's thoughts turn to death. He hates the idea of his body spending eternity in a cemetery, and he's bothered to think that that's what's happened to his brother Allie. Ultimately, it's the thought of how sad Phoebe would be if he died that gets Holden up and off the park bench. He's decided that he'll go home, sneak in, and pay "old Phoebe" a visit.



Chapter 21

Holden's got the good luck to find a substitute elevator boy on duty, and he makes it up to his parents' apartment without attracting too much attention. Phoebe is asleep in D.B.'s room, where she likes to stay when he's away, and Holden sneaks quietly into the room, sitting down at a big desk and leafing through some of Phoebe's notebooks, which he gets a big kick out of.

When Holden finally wakes Phoebe up, she's obviously thrilled to see him. She chatters about the Christmas play she's going to be in, about the movie she saw that afternoon, about a boy in school she's having a kid-drama with, and she reassures Holden by telling him that their parents are out a party and won't be back until very late.

Phoebe's a smart one, though, and pretty soon she gets around to asking why Holden's home on Saturday when he's supposed to arrive on Wednesday. Despite Holden's rationalizations, Phoebe's onto him, and is soon moaning with a very parental-sounding despair that he's obviously gotten kicked out of school again, and that "'Daddy'll *kill* you.'" (pg. 165) Holden tries to reassure her, but Phoebe will have none of that--she pulls a pillow over her head and refuses to come out.



Chapter 22

Holden returns from a quick trip to the living room, to steal some cigarettes, and finds that Phoebe still won't look at him. When Phoebe finally asks him why he got kicked out of Pencey, or more clearly, why he "did it," Holden spits out his problem with Pencey: that almost without exception, it's full of phonies and mean guys. Phoebe is not particularly sympathetic, and seems to think that Holden's problem is bigger than one of adjustment at Pencey Prep. She demands that he name one thing he likes, just one thing, then stares at him, waiting for an answer.

While she waits, Holden can't keep his mind on the question at hand, and he starts thinking about James Castle, a boy who got bullied around at one of Holden's old schools and ultimately jumped out of a window to his death. Phoebe interrupts his thoughts, now telling Holden, "You can't even think of one thing." (pg. 171) Holden finally answers that he likes Allie and that he likes what he's doing at the moment, sitting and chatting with Phoebe. Neither answer satisfies Holden's sister, and she demands next to know what Holden's going to do with his life. This question only leads Holden to another depressing rant about how most anything you do in the adult world ends up making a phony out of you.

Topic Tracking: Phonies 9

Topic Tracking: Innocence 8

Finally, sitting on the bed, Holden comes up with one job he'd like to have. He tells Phoebe of a vision he's had.

"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. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all." Chapter 22, pg. 173

Topic Tracking: Innocence 9

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 7

Phoebe can only sit silent after this, until she finally asserts one last time, "Daddy's going to kill you." (pg. 173)



Chapter 23

Holden makes a call to a favorite ex-teacher of his, Mr. Antolini, who, after hearing that Holden's been kicked out of Pencey, invites him over to his apartment. It's very late, and Holden's getting nervous again that his parents will come home.

When he returns to Phoebe, she's got the radio on and is in a better mood. She asks Holden to dance. The two dance a few numbers, and Holden explains that Phoebe's an excellent dancer, especially for a kid. The two are sitting around, joking with each other, when Phoebe shoots to attention--she's heard the front door open. Holden hides in the closet and Phoebe flicks the light off, but their mother can tell she's been awake. Phoebe lies honorably on Holden's behalf, even going so far as to take the blame for Holden's cigarette smoke, saying she took a fugitive puff herself.

After their mother leaves, Holden is ready to make his own exit. Phoebe gives him all of her Christmas money, and all of the sudden, Holden is overwhelmed and starts to cry. He gets himself together, though, gives Phoebe a hug and his favorite red hunting hat, and heads out again into the cold night.



Chapter 24

Holden likes Mr. Antolini for his wit and his kindness. He was the only person, Holden says, who would go near James Castle's body after he jumped to his death. Mr. Antolini now lives in a swanky apartment with his wife, who's rich and a good bit older than he.

The Antolini's threw a party earlier in the evening and Mr. Antolini has quite a few drinks in him. He's a little wired, though, and eager to talk with Holden. Holden is exhausted and hungover at this point, though he's grateful that Mr. Antolini's taken him in. Therefore, as with Mr. Spencer, Holden gives his best effort at listening to what amounts to a pretty scary lecture from his old teacher. Mr. Antolini is worried that Holden is headed for a fall, "a special kind of fall, a horrible kind." (pg. 187) He fears that Holden is going to end up alienated and hating everyone by the time he's thirty. He gives Holden a bunch of advice, most of it to the effect that he needs to stick with school and come to realize that he's "not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior." (pg. 189) Holden listens, though when a yawn escapes him, Mr. Antolini laughs and helps him make up the couch.

Topic Tracking: Innocence 10

Holden seems like he might finally get the good bit of sleep he needs, but something happens, he says, that he almost doesn't even want to talk about. He wakes in the middle of the night to find Mr. Antolini sitting beside the bed, petting him on the head. Holden has a very fierce reaction to this; he jumps up, asks Mr. Antolini what the hell he's doing, then grabs his clothes to make his exit. He tries to be a bit civil about it, saying he's just going to get his suitcase from the station, but when he walks out the door it's obvious he's not coming back.

Topic Tracking: Empathy 9



Chapter 25

At this point, Holden's at rock bottom. He goes to Grand Central and sleeps on a bench, more depressed than he's ever been. When he wakes up, he thinks maybe he jumped to conclusions about Mr. Antolini's behavior, though he's suspicious because he always seems to be the recipient of "perverted behavior."

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 8

It's only a few days before Christmas, and Holden walks through the city, filled with memories and sadness. He says,

"I kept walking and walking up Fifth Avenue, without any tie on or anything. Then all of a sudden, something very spooky started happening. Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again." Chapter 25, pg. 197

Topic Tracking: Innocence 11

This spooks Holden out, and he starts thinking about his dead brother Allie again, asking Allie not to let him disappear. It's now that Holden decides he's not going back home or back to any school, he'll go out West, get a job pumping gas, and live in a cabin. He also says,

"I thought what I'd do was, I'd pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody. If anybody wanted to tell me something, they'd have to write it on a piece of paper and shove it over to me. They'd get bored as hell doing that after a while, and then I'd be through with having conversations for the rest of my life." Chapter 25, pg. 198

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 9

Before he leaves, Holden wants to see Phoebe one last time, so he heads to her school with a note asking her to meet him at the art museum at lunchtime. While he's at the school, delivering the note, he sees 'Fuck you' written in two places, and this infuriates him. At the museum, where Holden leads a couple of little kids playing hooky in the direction of the mummy display, he sees the profanity written for the third time. This seems to say a lot about the world to Holden.

"That's the whole trouble. You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any. You may think there is, but once you get there, when you're not looking, somebody'll sneak up and write 'Fuck you' right under your nose." Chapter 25, pg. 204

Topic Tracking: Innocence 12



Phoebe shows at the appointed meeting place, dragging a big suitcase. She tells Holden she wants to come with him, news that makes Holden oddly furious. He tells Phoebe that she's supposed to be in the Christmas play, and that there's no way she's coming along. Phoebe gets mad and tosses Holden's red hunting hat at him. In what seems like an attempt to assuage her, Holden tells her that he's not going West, he's changed his mind and will go home if she goes back to school.

Holden suggests she skip school that afternoon and hang out with him, though Phoebe's so mad that she won't walk on the same side of the street with her brother. At the zoo, in front of the carousel, she finally softens up a bit. It's one of those carousels with a gold ring that kids make a grab for, and Phoebe rides it while Holden sits watching, even after it starts pouring rain. He finally feels better. In fact, watching Phoebe, he's "damn happy" (pg. 213) and he seems to have come to a new conclusion about innocence and childhood.

"The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them." Chapter 25, pg. 211

Topic Tracking: Innocence 13

Topic Tracking: Phonies 10

Topic Tracking: Empathy 10



Chapter 26

That's the end of Holden's story. He tells just a little bit about the sanatorium he's at now, before signing off. People keep asking him, he says, if he'll apply himself when he goes back to school next September. Holden doesn't know what to say to this question, nor does he know what to say when his brother D.B., who lives nearby, comes to visit one day and asks what Holden thinks of all that's happened to him. At the end of his story, all he thinks is that he's a little sorry he told so many people what happened, and that he sort of misses Stradlater and even Ackley and Maurice. He ends his story by saying, "Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody."

Chapter 25, pg. 214

Topic Tracking: Lies and Imagination 10