

The Catcher in the Rye

Background Info

Author Bio

Full Name: J. D. Salinger

Date of Birth: January 1, 1919

Place of Birth: New York City

Brief Life Story: Jerome David Salinger grew up on Park Avenue in New York. His father was a successful Jewish cheese importer, and his mother was Scotch-Irish Catholic. After struggling in several prep schools, Salinger attended Valley Forge Military Academy from 1934-1936. He went on to enroll in several colleges, including New York University and Columbia, though he never graduated. He took a fiction writing class in 1939 at Columbia that cemented the dabbling he had done in writing since his early teens. During World War II, Salinger ended up in the Army's infantry division and served in combat, including the invasion of Normandy in 1944. Salinger continued to write during the war and in 1940 he published his first short story in *Story* magazine. He went on to publish many stories in the *New Yorker*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Esquire*, and others from 1941 to 1948. In 1951 he published his only full-length novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, which rocketed Salinger into the public eye. Salinger hated his sudden fame and retired from New York to Cornish, New Hampshire, where he has lived ever since. He continues to avoid contact with the media, and has ceased to publish. No one knows if he continues to write.

Key Facts

Full Title: *The Catcher in the Rye*

Genre: Coming-of-Age Novel (Bildungsroman)

Setting: Agerstown, Pennsylvania and Manhattan, New York in 1950.

Climax: When Holden leaves Mr. Antolini's apartment

Protagonist: Holden Caulfield

Antagonist: Stradlater, Phonies, and Adults

Point of View: First person (Holden is the narrator)

Historical and Literary Context

When Published: 1951

Literary Period: Modern American

Related Literary Works: Not much is known about the influences Salinger drew upon to write *The Catcher in the Rye*. It is known that during World War II he met with Ernest Hemingway in Paris, which suggests that Salinger admired Hemingway's work. Even if that's true, it's difficult to trace any particular author's influence in *Catcher* because it's written in such a fresh and unique voice with a degree of candor and brashness perhaps unprecedented in American fiction.

Related Historical Events: Many parallels exist between Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye*, and J. D. Salinger: both grew up in upper class New York,

both flunked out of prep schools, and so on. It's no surprise, then, that Salinger's experience in World War II should cast a shadow over Holden's opinions and experiences in *The Catcher in the Rye*. World War II robbed millions of young men and women of their youthful innocence. Salinger himself witnessed the slaughter of thousands at Normandy, one of the war's bloodiest battles. In *Catcher* we see the impact of Salinger's World War II experience in Holden's mistrusting, cynical view of adult society. Holden views growing up as a slow surrender to the "phony" responsibilities of adult life, such as getting a job, serving in the military, and maintaining intimate relationships. World War I was supposedly "the war to end all wars"; World War II proved that this claim was as hollow as the "phony" ideas adult characters impose on Holden throughout *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Extra Credit

Banned in the Rye. Many critics dismissed the book as trash due to its healthy helping of four-letter words and sexual situations, and even today *Catcher in the Rye* has been banned in school districts in Washington, Ohio, Florida and Michigan.

Plot Summary

Writing from a rest home where he's recuperating from some illness or breakdown, **Holden Caulfield** says he'll tell the story of what happened to him just before the previous Christmas.

Holden's story begins at Pencey Prep on the day of the big football game. Instead of going to the game, Holden, who has just been expelled for failing four of his five classes, visits **Mr. Spencer**, his history teacher. Mr. Spencer lectures Holden about playing by the rules and thinking about his future. Holden pretends to agree with what he hears, but actually thinks Mr. Spencer is a "phony." Back in his dorm room, **Robert Ackley**, Holden's irritating neighbor, interrupts Holden as he tries to read, and **Ward Stradlater**, Holden's conceited and good-looking roommate heads out for a date with **Jane Gallagher**, a girl Holden knows and likes. Before he leaves, Stradlater asks Holden to write an English composition for him while he's away. Holden writes about his dead brother **Allie's** baseball mitt. When Stradlater returns, he says that the essay isn't on topic, and refuses to reveal the details of his date. Holden attacks and insults him. Stradlater punches Holden in the nose.

Holden decides to leave Pencey early. He takes a train to New York and rents a room at the Edmont Hotel. He soon feels lonely and depressed and starts acting strangely. He wears a red hunting cap everywhere he goes, asks cab drivers what hap-

pens to the ducks in the central park lagoon during the winter, and wanders around from the Hotel lounge to another bar trying to pick up women whom he claims to hate. Back at his hotel, the elevator man, **Maurice**, offers him a prostitute for \$5. Holden agrees, but is so uncomfortable when she arrives he says he can't have sex because of recent surgery. She demands \$10. When he refuses, she returns with Maurice. Maurice punches Holden in the stomach while she takes another five dollars.

The next morning, Holden makes a date with a girl he knows named **Sally Hayes**. He then wanders around town, and hears a boy singing a song while coming out of church: "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." Hoping to find his younger sister, **Phoebe**, Holden walks all the way to the **Museum of Natural History**, which he loves for its unchanging exhibits. But he decides not to enter the museum, and takes a cab to meet Sally Hayes instead.

The date does not go well. The play they see annoys Holden, as does the fact that Sally talks to a boy Holden thinks is phony. After going ice-skating, Holden begins to talk about everything he hates, and asks Sally to run away with him to a cabin in New England. She refuses and asks him to stop shouting. He insults her, makes her cry, and leaves. Later that night, Holden walks to Central Park to look at the **ducks in the lagoon**. There are

no ducks, it's freezing, and he imagines he might die, which he knows would make Phoebe miserable. He decides to go home to see her.

Holden sneaks into his family's apartment, wakes Phoebe, and tells her he's leaving to go live on a ranch in Colorado. Phoebe realizes Holden has been expelled, and asks him what he wants to be in his life. Holden says he'd like to be a **catcher in the rye**, who rescues children by catching them before they fall off a steep cliff at the edge of a giant rye field. Holden then goes to visit **Mr. Antolini**, his favorite former teacher. Mr. Antolini warns Holden that he's headed for a "terrible fall" and tries to convince him to be less rigid and judgmental. Holden listens, but is too tired and falls asleep. He wakes when he feels Mr. Antolini's hand stroking his head. He thinks Mr. Antolini is doing something perverted and leaves.

Holden decides to say goodbye to Phoebe before heading west. He meets her at the Museum of Art, where she begs him to take her with her. He refuses, and then promises that he won't go either. He takes her to the zoo, where he watches her ride the carousel. Phoebe gives Holden back his **red hunting hat**, which protects him from the rain that has just started to fall.

Holden's story shifts back to the rest home, where he now wishes he hadn't told so many people his story, because it only makes him miss the people he tells about.

Characters

Holden Caulfield – The novel's narrator and protagonist, Holden is a seventeen year-old high school junior who has flunked out of prep school several times. His sister is **Phoebe**, and he has a deceased younger brother, **Allie** and an older brother, D. B. On the brink adulthood, Holden struggles to bridge the gap between the innocent perfection he perceives in childhood (namely in Phoebe and Allie) and the "phoniness" that he thinks makes up most of adulthood and the rest of society. The strategy that Holden uses to counter the onslaught of prep school teachers and pubescent classmates that threaten his childhood innocence is evasion: he ditches school for New York and spends a few days bouncing between hotels and bars. Holden's escape to New York is an act of desperation, not maturity, as shown by his often inappropriately childish behavior

throughout the novel. He wears an awkward hunting hat in the middle of Manhattan and asks cab drivers about the ducks in Central Park, for example. Holden's eventual mental breakdown, which occurs some time before he begins writing his story, signifies the severity of his suffering as he faces the inevitability of growing up. His dream of becoming a "catcher in the rye" represents his wish to save other children from the descent into adulthood that he vainly tries to resist.

Phoebe Caulfield – Holden's younger sister. Though only ten years old, Phoebe is considerably more mature than Holden. She is a voice of reason throughout the novel, both in Holden's thoughts and in the advice she gives to him in person. Phoebe is also unusually perceptive: her insight into Holden's

misanthropy, his hatred of almost everything, is a key turning point in the novel. It's no coincidence that perhaps the most level headed and intelligent character in the novel is a child. Holden idealizes childhood and values children's ideas and opinions more than those of adults. Phoebe's intelligence and wise counsel offer a strong contrast to the lectures he receives from the various teachers and headmasters that he despises.

Allie Caulfield – Holden's deceased younger brother. Allie died of leukemia on July 18, 1946, when Holden was thirteen. Holden describes Allie as intelligent, calm, and friendly.

D. B. Caulfield – Holden's older brother. Holden looks up to D.B., but is disappointed in his decision to go to Hollywood

to write for the movies, which Holden thinks is an act similar to prostitution.

Jane Gallagher – A summer girlfriend of **Holden's**. Jane is one of the few people of whom Holden speaks fondly. In fact, he idealizes her so much that he makes her sound perfect.

Ward Stradlater – **Holden's** roommate at Pencey Prep. Though Stradlater is attractive and popular, Holden despises him for his arrogance and his "secret" dirty hygiene.

Robert Ackley – The peculiar and annoying student who lives in the room next to **Holden's**. Ackley's bad skin and teeth make him physically repulsive to Holden.

Sally Hayes – A beautiful girl whom **Holden** has dated in the past. Sally is an example of women to whom Holden is attracted, but does not respect.

Mr. Antolini – **Holden's** former English teacher, now an instructor at New York University. Mr. Antolini is one of the few adults Holden respects, and one of the few who is willing to both engage with Holden and yet also not to let Holden get

away with any of his tricks. He warns Holden that Holden is headed for a "terrible fall."

Mr. Spencer – **Holden's** history teacher at Pencey Prep who tries unsuccessfully to motivate Holden to "play by the rules," and take more responsibility for himself and his academic performance.

James Castle – A student at Elkton Hills (**Holden's** former school) who committed suicide by jumping out of his window after an argument with another student.

Faith Cavendish – A former stripper whom **Holden** calls to arrange a date shortly after he arrives in New York.

Mr. Haas – The headmaster of Elkton Hills, **Holden's** former school.

Carl Luce – Three years older than **Holden**, Luce was Holden's student advisor at the Whooton School.

Maurice – The elevator operator at the Edmont Hotel, who makes extra money by being a pimp.

Sunny – A teenage prostitute who **Holden** sees at the Edmont Hotel.

Horwitz – The taxi driver who explains to **Holden** about the ducks in the Central Park lagoon.

Bernice Krebs – A girl **Holden** dances with at the Edmont Hotel's nightclub.

Lillian Simmons – An obnoxious girl that **D.B.** once dated. **Holden** avoids her at Ernie's.

Dr. Thurmer – The Pencey Prep headmaster. He tells **Holden** that "life is a game," advice that Mr. Spencer repeats to Holden at the beginning of the novel.

Ernest Morrow – A boy who **Holden** considers the "biggest bastard" at Pencey. Holden meets Ernest's mother on the train to New York.

Rudolf Schmidt – The Pencey Prep janitor. **Holden** uses his name when he introduces himself to **Ernest Morrow's** mother on the train to New York.

Themes

In LitCharts, each theme gets its own corresponding color, which you can use to track where the themes occur in the work. There are two ways to track themes:

- Refer to the color-coded bars next to each plot point throughout the *Summary and Analysis* sections.
- Use the *ThemeTracker* section to get a quick overview of where the themes appear throughout the entire work.

Phoniness

Holden constantly encounters people and situations that strike him as "phony," a word he applies to anything hypocritical, shallow, superficial, inauthentic, or otherwise fake. He sees such "phoniness" everywhere in the adult world, and believes adults are so phony that they can't even see their own phoniness. And Holden is right. Many of the characters in the novel, from **Ackley** and **Stradlater**, to **Sally**, to **Mr. Spencer** are often phony, and say and do things that keep up appearances rather than reflect what they truly think and feel.

Yet even though Holden is right that people are phony, *Catcher in the Rye* makes it clear that Holden's hatred of phoniness is still self-destructive. Though Holden is constantly pointing out the phoniness in others, he is himself often phony. At various times in the novel, he tells pointless lies, claims to like or agree with statements or ideas he hates, goes out with girls he doesn't like, all to try to feel less lonely or to avoid direct confrontations. The point, then, is that, yes, people are "phony" and can't live up to Holden's wish that the world be simple, a place of black and white. But in the end what **Mr. Antolini** is trying to make Holden see is that while this "phoniness" is harmful and hurtful, it doesn't make people evil or worthy of hate. It makes them human. Holden, in effect, is wishing that the world could be inhuman, could be something that it never can be.

Alienation and Meltdown

From the very first scene of *Catcher in the Rye*, when **Holden** decides not to attend the football game that the rest of his school is attending, it is clear that Holden doesn't fit in. What

makes *The Catcher in the Rye* unique, however, is not the fact that Holden is an alienated teenager, but its extremely accurate and nuanced portrayal of the causes, benefits, and costs of his isolation.

In short, alienation both protects and harms Holden. It protects him by ensuring that he will not ever have to form connections with other people that might wind up causing awkwardness, rejection, or the sort of intense emotional pain he felt when **Allie** died. Just as Holden wears his hunting cap as a sign of independence, separation, and protection from the world, he creates his own alienation for the same purpose. The problem, though, is that Holden is human. He may wish that he didn't need human contact, but he does. So while his alienation protects him, it also severely harms him, making him intensely lonely and depressed. He therefore reaches out, to **Mr. Spencer**, or **Carl Luce**, or **Sally**, but then his fear of human interaction reasserts itself and he does his best to insult or make the very people he wants to connect with angry at him. Holden has gotten himself caught in a cycle of self-destruction: his fear of human contact leads to alienation, which leads to loneliness, which causes him to reach out to another person, which excites his fear of human contact and leads to a terrible experience that convinces him that people are no good, which leads to alienation... and so on.

Women and Sex

Like most teenagers, **Holden** struggles with his sexuality. He considers himself a "sex maniac," but is also completely inexperienced. In addition, he has very strong and often contradictory feelings about women. Most women, such as **Bernice Krebs** and **Sally Hayes**, he sees as utterly stupid, largely because they seem interested in boys and men, whom Holden knows from experience are up to no good. On the other hand, Holden sees **Jane Gallagher** as a perfect woman: kind, loving, gentle, innocent, wonderful. In other words, he idealizes her. Yet the fact that he is so frightened to call or talk to her implies that he knows that she can't possibly be as perfect as he wants her to be. In the end, Holden's feelings about women and sex mirror his feelings about society as a whole. He desperately wants to have a girlfriend, have sex, and achieve emotional intimacy, and at the same time is desperately afraid as well.

himself and other children from having to grow up into an adult world he sees as "phony." The image is even more symbolic because it is based on Holden mishearing a song based on Robert Burns (1759-1796) poem "Coming Thro the Rye," which is about two bodies meeting in the rye to have sex. Holden's misinterpretation underscores both his desire to shield children from the adult world, and his misunderstanding about just how innocent the world of children is.

Childhood and Growing Up

In contrast to all adults whom **Holden** sees as riddled with flaws and phoniness, he sees children as pure, gentle, innocent, and perfect. The characters he speaks most fondly about in the novel are all children: **Allie**, **Phoebe**, and the poor boy he hears singing the song about the "catcher in the rye." He constantly dreams up schemes to escape growing up, such as fleeing to a New England cabin or working on a ranch out West. The only role that Holden envisions for himself in life—catching children before they fall off a cliff—is symbolic of his wish to save himself and other children from having to one day grow up.

However, Holden's view of perfect childhood is as incorrect as his view of the adult world as entirely "phony," and just helps Holden hide from the fact that the complex issues ranging from sex, to intimacy, to facing death, all of which he will have to face in growing up, terrify him. Further, this form of delusional self-protection can only last so long. Holden *will* grow up, whether he likes it or not. **Mr. Antolini** and **Phoebe** both make it clear that unless he learns to accept the complexities of adulthood, he will end up, at best, bitter and alone.

Madness, Depression, Suicide

If "phony" is the most frequently repeated word in *The Catcher in the Rye*, "crazy," "madman," and "depressed" rank close behind it. Because **Holden** is the narrator of the novel, and because he seems in so many ways to be a typical teenager battling typical teenage issues of identity, it seems like he is using these words for effect. In other words, when he says he's crazy he seems to mean that he's acting oddly, or inconsistently, or stupidly, but not that he's actually going insane. And when he says he wishes he were dead, it likewise seems at first as if he's using the phrase as a teenage expression to make his emotions seem as intense to you as they seem to him. But as the novel progresses, it begins to become clear through hints and an intensification of Holden's own language that Holden really is on the verge of losing it, and really is seriously thinking of killing himself as the only way out of this world he can't control or understand.

Holden's Red Hunting Hat

Holden's red hunting hat is a symbol of his alienation. It protects him, and makes him feel unique, but also singles him out as strange, which in turn reinforces his alienation. The hat is also a symbol of Holden's attachment to childhood—it's the kind of goofy accessory that a proper adult wouldn't wear.

Symbols

Symbols are shown in **red** text whenever they appear in the *Plot Summary* and *Summary and Analysis* sections of this LitChart.

The Catcher in the Rye

What **Holden** most wants to be in life is someone who stands on the edge of a cliff in a rye field catching children before they fall. The image is symbolic of Holden's desire to save both

The Ducks in the Lagoon in Central Park


Holden's fixation on the ducks is also a symbol of his struggle with change and growing up. He wants things to stay the same, but the ducks prove that one must adapt to the environment,

that one has to change in order to survive. At the same time, the duck's offer hope: though they disappear each winter, they always reappear.

The Museum of Natural History


Holden loves the permanence of the exhibits at the Museum of Natural History because, unlike people, the displays never change. This constancy satisfies Holden's desire to stop time and remain in childhood.

Summary and Analysis


The color-coded bars in *Summary and Analysis* make it easy to track the themes through the work. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section. For instance, a bar of  indicates that all five themes apply to that part of the summary.

Chapter 1


Holden Caulfield, the novel's narrator and protagonist, says he wants to tell the story of some "madman stuff" that happened to him around last Christmas. It's now a few months into 1950 and Holden is recuperating at an unspecified location after becoming "run-down."

Holden is in a mental hospital or similar facility after suffering a nervous breakdown. He's been taken out of society so that he can recover. 


Holden refuses to talk about his childhood, though he comments that his parents are "touchy as hell" and that his brother, **D.B.**, who visits him weekly, writes for Hollywood. Holden compares D.B.'s new job to prostitution.

First instance of Holden's negative view of adults, as well as his hatred of "phony" pursuits like screenwriting. 


Holden begins his story at Pencey Prep, an exclusive private school for boys in Agerstown, Pennsylvania, on the day that Pencey has its annual football game against arch rival Saxon Hall. Even the Pencey headmaster, **Dr. Thurmer**, is at the game. Holden calls him a "phony slob."

Basically the whole school goes to the game except Holden. He's an outsider, who dislikes the headmaster and his classmates. 

Holden isn't even supposed to be at Pencey. He was supposed to be in New York City with the fencing team, of which he was manager. But he accidentally left the team's foils (swords) on the subway and the team had to come back early. Holden finds the whole mix-up amusing.


Holden is immature. He doesn't act responsibly, and then he acts as if he doesn't care. 

Holden also mentions that he's failed four of his five classes—everything but English—and been expelled. So instead of going to the game, he goes to visit his history teacher, **Mr. Spencer**, to say goodbye.


Holden seems almost to be trying to get himself kicked out of school. He doesn't want to grow up, and wants to be alone. 

Chapter 2


Mr. Spencer's house makes **Holden** depressed. It's small and appearance reminds him of old age.

Holden finds "old age" and adulthood repulsive. 


Mr. Spencer greets him warmly, and they start to talk. At one point, Mr. Spencer tells **Holden** to heed **Dr. Thurmer's** advice that life is a game that must be played by the rules. Holden agrees, but privately comments that life is really only a game for people on the winning side.

Holden rejects the rules imposed by society and adulthood because he feels like an outsider. He feels like he isn't on the "winning side." Mr. Spencer's warmth implies Holden is a good kid, though. 


Mr. Spencer next comments that he once met with **Holden's** parents, who are "grand" people, which strikes Holden as a "phony" word. Mr. Spencer continues to lecture him, reminding Holden that he failed history because he knew nothing and wrote an atrocious essay on the Egyptians. He even reads the essay to Holden.

Holden doesn't apply himself because he doesn't value the things that academic success brings. If the adult world is phony, then academic success will just bring him into that phony world. 


Eventually, **Holden** begins to tune out, and wonders to himself where the **ducks** in the Central Park lagoon go during winter.

Holden's wandering mind is like a child's. His focus on the ducks will become significant later. 

Mr. Spencer asks why **Holden** failed out of two other prep schools (Whooton and Elkton Hills). Thinking Spencer wouldn't understand, Holden tells him only that it's a long story. But privately he says he wanted out of Elkton Hills because he was "surrounded by phonies," especially the headmaster who only gave him time to the wealthier, better-looking parents.


Holden often seems selfish, but his reasons for disliking Elkton Hills are sensitive and astute. His description of the principal currying favor from the richer, prettier parents is totally believable. Phoniness is real, and Holden can spot it. 

When **Mr. Spencer** encourages **Holden** to plan for the future, Holden has had enough. He assures Spencer he's just going through a phase, and stands to leave. On his way out, Mr. Spencer wishes him "good luck," an expression Holden hates.


Holden doesn't want to plan for the future. In fact, he doesn't want there to be a future, because in the future he'll be an adult and he thinks adults are phony. 

Chapter 3


Holden returns to his dorm in Ossenburger Hall, which is named after a Pencey alum who got rich from owning funeral homes.

A man getting rich off death is an example of real phoniness in the world. 

Alone in his room, **Holden** reads Isaac Dinesen's *Out of Africa* while wearing his new **red hunting cap**. But **Robert Ackley**, Holden's neighbor, barges in. Ackley is repulsive, with bad skin and hygiene, and acts as if you're lucky to spend time with him even though he's disliked by almost everyone. When Ackley comments on Holden's hunting hat, Holden tells him it's a "people shooting hat."


It's clear Holden dislikes adults. Now it becomes obvious that Holden dislikes almost everyone. While he seems to realize that Ackley acts macho to hide insecurity, Holden doesn't see how his own act resembles Ackley's. 

Eventually, **Ward Stradlater**, Holden's big, strong, handsome roommate enters. **Ackley** hates Stradlater, and leaves. Stradlater says he has a date.


Holden's awareness of his peers' bodies and appearance is a sign of teenage sexual discomfort. 

Chapter 4


Holden keeps **Stradlater** company as he shaves to prepare for his date. Holden comments that Stradlater is a "secret" slob, who is handsome but has personal habits as dirty as **Ackley's**.

Stradlater's "secret" slobbery is a sign of phoniness. He's pretending to be something he isn't. 


Stradlater asks **Holden** to do his English homework for him. Holden asks Stradlater who he's dating. When Stradlater doesn't immediately tell Holden, Holden puts him in a half nelson.

Stradlater is a phony user. Holden's response shows his anxiety about dating. The half-nelson seems socially inappropriate. 

Though annoyed, **Stradlater** says that his date is **Jane Gallagher**, whom he mistakenly calls "Jean." **Holden** knows her, and goes on for a while about playing checkers with her one summer, but Stradlater doesn't seem to care. Eventually, he borrows Holden's hound's-tooth jacket, and leaves.


Holden's story about Jane is childish and idealistic. In contrast, Stradlater is going on a date with her and cares more about her body than her name. 

Holden remains in the bathroom, uncomfortable with thoughts of **Jane** and the sexually experienced **Stradlater** together. When he returns to his room, **Ackley** again barges in. This time Holden's happy to see him.


Holden thinks of Jane as being innocent. This image can't coexist with her dating Stradlater. Holden's pleasure at seeing Ackley shows his loneliness. 

Chapter 5

After dinner, **Holden** convinces his friend **Mal Brossard** to let **Ackley** come see a movie with them. But when they realize that Mal and Ackley have already seen the movie, they eat hamburgers and play pinball instead.

While Stradlater's on a date, Holden wanders around with boys. At the same time, Holden acts compassionately toward Ackley. 

Back at Pencey, **Ackley** hangs out in **Holden's** room telling a story about having sex with a girl, which Holden knows is a lie.

Ackley seems to have similar teenage issues about sex as Holden. 

Holden finally gets **Ackley** to leave by starting **Stradlater's** composition. Though it's off topic, he writes about his brother **Allie's** baseball mitt, which Allie had covered with poems. Holden was thirteen when Allie died of leukemia at age eleven on July 18, 1946. He describes Allie as kind, innocent, and the smartest person in his family. The night Allie died Holden slept in the garage and broke the windows with his bare hands.

With the revelation of Allie's death, suddenly Holden's teenage insecurity and alienation doesn't seem quite so typical. Allie's death in childhood certainly makes it seem like life's "rules" are arbitrary and cruel, and provides an explanation for Holden's fixation on childhood. Punching window pains is a sign of severe unhappiness.



Chapter 6

After returning from his date, **Stradlater** reads the composition, then angrily tells **Holden** that it's no wonder he's getting expelled: he doesn't do anything "the way you're supposed to." Holden rips up the assignment.

Stradlater knows how to play the "game," but he's also clearly less intelligent and less sensitive than Holden is.



Holden starts smoking a cigarette in the room just to annoy **Stradlater**, then asks what happened on the date. Stradlater refuses to say. Holden tries to punch him. Stradlater wrestles Holden to the ground. Holden insults Stradlater, who punches Holden, bloodying his nose.

Holden clearly hates the idea that anything sexual might have happened between Stradlater and Jane. His defeat here symbolizes the larger fight he will also lose against growing up.



After **Stradlater** leaves, **Holden** puts on his **red hunting hat** and looks at his face in the mirror. He thinks the blood makes him look tough, though he's a "pacifist."

Putting on his "people hunting hat" is an act of defiance but also alienation. Still, Holden recognizes his own "phoniness."



Chapter 7

Holden asks **Ackley** if he can sleep in his room, since his roommate is out of town. But Ackley refuses. Holden then asks if it's possible to join a monastery without being Catholic. Ackley gets annoyed. Holden leaves.

Even as he tries to have company, Holden is talking about escaping society. His loneliness and desire for alienation are at cross-purposes.



In the hallway, lonely and tormented by the suspicion that **Stradlater** may have had sex with **Jane Gallagher**, **Holden** decides to leave Pencey and hide out for a few days in New York City until his parents learn he's been expelled and then calm down a bit. He packs and puts on his hunting cap. Crying now, he shouts "Sleep tight, ya morons!" and leaves.

Holden's loneliness and anger about Jane possibly sleeping with Stradlater drive him to leave Pencey, his society, to be alone in New York. His crying indicates something more than just typical teenage sadness, something more like depression.



Chapter 8

On the train to New York, a woman sits next to him. She notices his Pencey bag, and says her son is **Ernest Morrow**. **Holden** hates Ernest, but lies and says that Ernest is extremely popular and would be class president if he would just let himself be nominated.

Holden hates phoniness in others, but can't avoid it in himself. By lying to people, he makes himself feel superior. This gives him an excuse for his loneliness: he's too smart for them.



Holden introduces himself to the woman as **Rudolf Schmidt**, the name of Pencey's janitor, and invites Mrs. Morrow to have a cocktail with him in the club car. She asks why he's out of school. He says he's leaving Pencey early to have surgery for a brain tumor.

Holden may hate adulthood, but when he deals with women he often tries to act older than he is. Perhaps he hates adulthood because he feels he can't be a successful adult.



Chapter 9

In Penn Station in New York, **Holden** wants to talk to someone, and considers calling **D.B.**, his younger sister **Phoebe**, **Jane**, or another friend named **Sally Hayes**. He calls none of them.

A sign of Holden's loneliness, self-imposed alienation, and depression: he has friends but doesn't want to contact them.



Instead, **Holden** puts on his hunting cap and hails a cab to the Edmont Hotel. On the way, he asks the driver where the **ducks** in the Central Park lagoon go in the winter, but the driver thinks he's joking and gets annoyed.

Holden's hat and his duck question are both childish and inappropriate for someone his age.



From his room in the hotel, **Holden** can see into other rooms. In one, a man is cross-dressing. In another, a couple spits their drinks in each other faces. Holden gets aroused, and thinks he's both a "sex maniac" and doesn't understand sex at all.

The things Holden sees reinforce that Holden isn't wrong: there is phoniness in the adult world. And Holden actually finds himself aroused by it. That may be part of why he hates it.



Again he thinks of calling **Jane**, but instead calls **Faith Cavendish**, a woman whose number he got from a guy who told **Holden** she was promiscuous. She refuses to meet him that night, but offers to meet him tomorrow. He doesn't want to wait that long, and hangs up.

Holden obviously would rather see Jane, but he sees her as innocent and perfect and thinks of sex as dirty. To protect his illusions of Jane's purity, he isolates himself.



Chapter 10

Holden again considers calling **Phoebe**. Holden describes Phoebe: she has red hair, is very intelligent, funny, and creative (she writes about a girl detective named Hazel Weatherfield) and is one of the few people who truly understands him. Her only flaw is that she can be emotional.

Holden seems to believe that only children—Allie, Phoebe—can understand him. It's ironic, though, that he faults Phoebe for being emotional. Clearly, Holden is emotional as well.



Bored and not tired, **Holden** goes to the hotel nightclub, the Lavender Room. He orders a drink, but the waiter asks for an ID.

Holden hates adulthood, but pretends to be older.



Soon **Holden** starts flirting with three women visiting from Seattle. He asks one, a blond named **Bernice Krebs**, to dance. Though she's a good dancer he thinks Bernice is a "moron" and is offended when she asks his age.

Holden tries to trick women into liking him; whenever he senses this is working he thinks the woman is dumb for falling for the trick. It's a vicious cycle that keeps him alone.



Holden soon becomes depressed by the women's obsession with movie stars. He eventually lies and says he just saw Gary Cooper, and one of the three claims to have also seen him. Eventually, Holden pays for their drinks, and departs.

Again Holden successfully reveals the phoniness of others. But he is just as phony. Is his hatred of them connected to hatred of himself?



Chapter 11

In the hotel lobby, **Holden** thinks about the summer he spent with **Jane Gallagher** in Maine. Their families had rented neighboring houses, and Holden and Jane often played checkers and held hands.

Holden's memories of Jane are idealistic and un-sexual: they played checkers together and held hands.



Once **Jane's** stepfather made her cry simply by asking for cigarettes. **Holden** comforted and kissed her. He comments that when he would hold Jane's hand he would be truly happy, and adds that she was the only person he ever showed **Allie's** baseball mitt.

The reference to Allie's mitt connects Allie to Jane. Holden thinks of them both in pure, idealistic terms. Note how Holden enjoyed protecting and comforting Jane.



Now depressed, **Holden** remembers a bar called Ernie's that **D.B.** once took him to, and hails a cab.

That childhood dream is over. Reality depresses Holden.



Chapter 12

Holden strikes up a conversation with his cab driver, who's named **Horwitz**, then finally asks about the **ducks** in the Central park lagoon. Horwitz becomes angry at this stupid question. Horwitz shouts that fish have it worse than the ducks, but that they survive because "it's their nature."

This is the second time an adult rejects Holden's childish questions. Horwitz's explanation of the fish's ability to survive winter contrasts with Holden's inability to adapt to his surroundings.



At Ernie's, the scene disgusts **Holden**: it's filled with the "phonies" from fancy colleges and prep schools whom he despises. In one conversation, Holden overhears, a guy he refers to as "Joe Yale" describe a fellow student's suicide attempt while trying to feel up his date under the table.

Again, society is phony and "Joe Yale" is undeniably an insensitive jerk. But while most people could shrug this off, Holden can't. Phoniness eats at him and makes him furious.



A girl named **Lillian Simmons**, who used to date **D.B.**, approaches **Holden**. They exchange a few words, but Holden feels unbearably awkward. He lies that he was just on his way out and darts for the door, privately commenting that people always ruin things for him.

It's a classic unconscious ploy of someone who feels alienated to tell themselves that they aren't the source of their own alienation. But it's also delusional.



Chapter 13

Feeling terrible for running from Ernie's, **Holden** walks forty-one blocks back to his hotel. He wishes he had his gloves, which were stolen at Pencey. He imagines finding the thief, but then decides he's too cowardly for direct confrontations.

Walking forty-one blocks in the freezing cold is definitely the act of a depressed man. As are grand visions of noble action, followed by intense self-criticism.



In the hotel, the elevator operator, **Maurice**, offers to send a prostitute to his room for five dollars. **Holden** accepts, but immediately regrets it. He's a virgin and thinks that he isn't aggressive enough to get girls, but also says he feels sorry for girls because they are "so dumb," which stops him from going all the way.

Holden accepts the offer of the prostitute out of loneliness and a desire to be more adult. But he isn't an adult, and is frightened of both sex and human contact, and immediately regrets it.



A young prostitute, **Sunny**, arrives. **Holden** tries to talk to her, but she just undresses, sits on his lap, and talks dirty. Holden tells her he can't have sex because of a recent operation on his "clavichord."

Though a child, Sunny, a teenage prostitute, is in the most "adult" of all professions: prostitution. But Holden is still a child: he wants to talk.



Holden pays **Sunny** five dollars, but she claims he owes her ten. He refuses. She leaves angrily, making him more depressed.

Instead of protecting Holden, the adult world tries to exploit him.



Chapter 14

Holden, alone, remembers a time when he excluded **Allie** from a game. He still feels guilty about it. He gets into bed, and is surprised that he feels like praying. He says he's "sort of an atheist," and dislikes ministers because they speak in a phony tone of voice.

Holden's rejection of society includes religion. He views ministers as actors, all of whom he considers phonies because they hide their true selves.



A knock sounds on the door. **Holden** opens it. **Maurice** demands five dollars, and pins Holden while **Sunny** takes the money from Holden's wallet. When Holden calls Maurice a "dirty moron," Maurice punches him in the stomach, leaving him crying on the floor.

Perhaps the biggest condemnation of adult society in Catcher is not its phoniness, but that rather than protect the fragile Holden, it literally assaults him.



Holden images himself as a movie star shot in the gut by an enemy, and imagines taking his revenge. He then says he feels like committing suicide by jumping out the window. Eventually, he goes to sleep.

Note Holden's consistent wariness of actors and the movies. Also note how, now incredibly lonely, he begins to fixate on his own death.



Chapter 15

The next morning **Holden** calls up **Sally Hayes**. He says that Sally is a girl who seems intelligent and sophisticated, but is actually stupid. He makes a date with her for that afternoon.

If she seems smart, why does Holden think she's stupid? Because she dates boys like Holden.



Holden checks out of the hotel and goes to Grand Central Station to store his bags in a locker, and thinks of his family: his father is a successful corporate lawyer, and his mother has been nervous and ill since **Allie** died. He worries what his expulsion from Pencey will do to her.

Holden's father is the kind of phony Holden dislikes. His mother has perhaps suffered a nervous breakdown similar to Holden's.



While having breakfast at a sandwich shop, **Holden** meets two nuns carrying cheap suitcases. He talks with them, though as they discuss *Romeo and Juliet* he wonders if they're comfortable with its sexual content.

Note the contrast between Holden's words and his thoughts: adult sophistication vs. adolescent fixation on sex.



Though low on funds, **Holden** gives the nuns a ten-dollar donation. After the nuns leave, Holden wishes he had given them more than ten dollars. He decides that money always ends up depressing everybody.

Another contradiction: Holden makes a donation to nuns after describing himself as an atheist. He has positive feelings for any non-sexual women, but his depression clouds even the most pleasant encounters.



Chapter 16

It's now Sunday. **Holden** buys a children's record for **Phoebe** and thinks about how Phoebe always understands what he's really saying. While passing a church he overhears a poor little boy singing, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." The boy's voice and innocent image makes him happy. He calls **Jane**, but hangs up when her mother answers.

Holden's thoughts about Phoebe and joy at the young boy's song indicate Holden's idealization of the purity of childhood. This feeling of purity makes him feel able to call Jane, but he still can't deal with the adult world.



Holden buys theater tickets for his date with **Sally**, even though he hates actors in particular and dislikes the theater in general.

Holden hates things that aren't what they seem, including actors.



Holden then heads over to the Mall, a part of the park where **Phoebe** often roller-skates on Sundays. He meets a girl who thinks Phoebe's at the **Museum of Natural History** with her class. Though it soon becomes clear that the class trip was Saturday, Holden walks to the museum anyway. Holden thinks about how comforting it is that the museum's displays are frozen in time. He says you can always go back to the museum and discover that the only thing that has changed is you yourself.

Holden, who fears and hates adulthood, likes things that don't change. The museum displays fit this description. They stop time, just as Allie's death froze Allie in the ideal state of childhood.



But when **Holden** arrives at the museum he finds he doesn't want to go inside. He takes a cab to meet **Sally Hayes** instead.

Holden fears going into the museum just as he fears calling Jane. He's protecting his illusions.



Chapter 17

Sally shows up ten minutes late to meet **Holden**, but looks so good he doesn't hold it against her. He feels like marrying her, even though he doesn't particularly like her. He keeps describing himself as crazy.

Holden's first real attempt to connect with a girl. His emotions fly out of control, and he seems to sense he's losing his grip.



At the play, the actors' performances seem phony and conceited to **Holden**. During intermission, **Sally** talks to a boy named George who she knows from Andover. Their phony conversation disgusts Holden.

Anyone who seems self-confident or comfortable in society strikes Holden as phony. He only trusts disdain and skepticism.



After the performance, **Holden** and **Sally** go ice-skating. Holden guesses that Sally wanted to go ice-skating just to wear a little skirt and show off her "cute ass," which, he has to admit, looks good.

Holden's conflicted feelings about girls arise again. Even if he's right about Sally, it should flatter him. But he seems to think it makes Sally a threat.



Soon they head inside. As they drink cokes, **Holden** asks **Sally** if she gets fed up with stuff like school. Holden then says that he hates school and everything else: taxis, New York, etc. Sally asks him to stop shouting, but Holden continues that he's only in New York because of Sally and would otherwise be off in a cabin in the woods. He says he's in bad shape. Sally readily agrees.

Hating everything and wanting to escape society completely are signs of depression. Sally's request that Holden stop shouting, though, shows that he's past depression—he's out of control. His comment about being in bad shape shows he knows he's on a downward spiral.



Suddenly **Holden** suggests they should run away to New England and live in a cabin together. **Sally** tells him there will be time for such things when they're older. Holden tells Sally she's "a royal pain in the ass." Sally starts to cry. Holden apologizes, then starts to laugh, then finally leaves.

Sally reacts realistically to Holden's fantasy of escape from society and adulthood. Sally is playing life by the rules, which drives Holden into a rage.



Holden remarks in retrospect that he wouldn't want to go with Sally on a trip anyway, and concludes that he must be insane.

It's ironic that Holden says he's insane for inviting Sally on the trip, when he's just been screaming at her.



Chapter 18

Holden thinks about calling up **Jane Gallagher** again, and remembers a time when he saw her with Al Pike from Choate, a boy he thought was stuck-up. Jane claimed Al just had an inferiority complex, which Holden thinks girls use as an excuse to justify dating arrogant boys.

After his encounter with Sally, Holden's idealized vision of Jane threatens to break down. He remembers an incident that doesn't fit with his illusion.



Holden calls up **Carl Luce**, a friend from the Whooton School who attends Columbia. They plan to meet that night.

Holden tries again to relieve his loneliness.



In the meantime, **Holden** goes to Radio City Music Hall to see a movie. He's annoyed by the Rockettes pre-movie dance, but remembers how he and **Allie** used to love the man in the orchestra who played kettledrum because the man seemed to enjoy it so much.

The Rockettes dance is phony to the core. The kettle drummer is just the opposite: he enjoys exactly what he's doing. But is either really something to get worked up about?



The movie is about the war. Afterward, as **Holden** walks to meet **Luce**, he thinks about **D.B.**'s experience in World War II. He thinks that he could never be in the army. If a war came, he thinks, he would volunteer to sit on top of an atomic bomb.

Holden again thinks about suicide. Also note his selfishness: in thinking about war he thinks only of himself. It's as if he's so alienated the rest of the world doesn't exist for him.



Chapter 19

Holden waits for **Carl Luce** at the Wicker Bar in the Seton Hotel. He says the place is filled with so many phonies it's enough to make anyone "hate everybody in the world."

Holden's depressed hatred-of-everything rant gains in intensity.



Holden says **Luce** knew more about sex than anybody at the Whooton School, even though he always seemed somewhat "flirty" (homosexual). When **Luce** arrives, **Holden** asks him about his sex life. Though **Luce** admits that he's dating an older woman, he resists getting into what he calls a "typical Caulfield conversation."

Holden's thoughts about Luce betray his teenage sexual insecurity, right down to his fears about homosexuality. Just as Holden seemed to purposely sabotage any connection with Sally, he does the same with Luce.



Luce asks **Holden** if he's ever going to grow up, and says **Holden's** sex life is lousy because he's immature. **Holden** agrees. **Luce** tells **Holden** to see a psychoanalyst. **Holden** remembers that **Luce's** father is a psychoanalyst, and asks him if he was ever analyzed by his father. **Luce**, annoyed, leaves.

Luce clearly recognizes that Holden needs help. But Holden responds by protecting his alienation: he seems to imply a homosexual relationship between Luce and his father in order to make Luce go away.



Chapter 20

Holden gets drunk at the Wicker Bar. He thinks about calling **Jane**, but instead calls **Sally** from a pay phone, and ends up infuriating both **Sally** and her grandmother.

Jane represents childhood; Sally represents adulthood. Holden tries to have successful adult interactions, but they all fail.



Back in the bar, **Holden** goes to the bathroom and imagines himself as an actor "concealing the fact that I was a wounded sunuvabitch." He unsuccessfully hits on the lounge singer and the hat-check girl. Finally, he picks up his hat at the hat-check and leaves.

Holden imagines himself hiding the fact that he's a "wounded sunuvabitch." But he's not just imagining it—he actually is "wounded" and is trying to hide it.



Holden walks to Central Park to check on the **ducks** in the lagoon. During the walk, **Holden** drops the record he bought for **Phoebe** and nearly cries. At the park, the lagoon is half frozen and there are no ducks.

The children's record breaks. The ducks adapt and change to survive. Holden can't protect childhood and avoid growing up.



Holden sits on a bench, freezing. He thinks he might catch pneumonia and imagines his own funeral. He then remembers how he missed **Allie's** funeral because he was still in the hospital from having smashed the garage windows with his bare hands.

Holden connects his own death to Allie's, and it seems likely that Allie's death is the source of Holden's depression. He seems to be still hurt, angry, and suffering.



Holden thinks how awful **Phoebe** would feel if he died of pneumonia, so he decides to go see her. He knows returning home is risky because he might get caught by his parents, but he suspects they'll be asleep and he'll be able to slip in and out without seeing them.

Holden snaps out of his suicidal fantasy by thinking of the wishes of a child, his sister. It's by thinking of society, rather than himself, that saves him.



Chapter 21

Holden sneaks into his family's apartment. He finds **Phoebe** in **D.B.**'s room, where she likes to sleep when **D.B.** is away. **Holden** notices how children look much more peaceful than adults do when asleep.

A familiar contrast between children and adults, with children once again coming out on top in Holden's estimation.



While **Phoebe** sleeps, **Holden** looks through her school notebooks. Her scribbling and drawings delight him and he likes that she's signed her name: "Phoebe Weatherfield Caulfield." Her real middle name is Josephine.

Only children and childish things delight Holden. He likes things that are random and don't follow the rules.



Holden wakes **Phoebe** up. She's overjoyed to see him and floods him with news, from her role as Benedict Arnold in the school play, to a movie she saw, to the fact that their parents are out at a social event and won't return until later that night.

In some respects, Holden is right about children versus adults. Unlike adults, Phoebe immediately accepts Holden and is open with him, not phony.



Phoebe then realizes **Holden** is home two days too early. **Holden** admits he got expelled. **Phoebe** keeps repeating that their father is going to "kill" him. **Holden** tries to calm her, but she covers her head with a pillow.

Holden tries to hide from the adult world. Phoebe tries to hide from Holden. She can sense he's in trouble.



Holden tells her not to worry: he's going away to a ranch in Colorado. She keeps the pillow over her head. **Holden** calls **Phoebe** a "true madman."

Holden makes another unintended ironic statement about insanity. Clearly he's the madman.



Chapter 22

Phoebe asks why **Holden** flunked out of Pencey. He tries to explain about phonies. **Phoebe** says **Holden** doesn't like anything and challenges him to name one thing he likes a lot.

Holden makes his usual claim that his alienation is society's fault, but Phoebe won't let him get away with it.



While thinking up an answer, **Holden's** mind wanders to the nuns he met that morning, and to **James Castle**, an Elkton Hills student who committed suicide by jumping out his room window after being bullied by classmates.

Whenever anyone tries to question Holden he immediately thinks of escape, whether a monastery or suicide.



Holden finally says he likes **Allie** and talking to **Phoebe**. **Phoebe** says that doesn't count because **Allie** is dead.

Holden hates the living world because he's trying to preserve a dead world.



Phoebe then asks **Holden** what he would like to be. After some thought, he mentions the lyric "If a body catch a body coming through the rye," and says he'd like most to be a **catcher in the rye** who rescues children from falling off a cliff while playing in a rye field.

Holden's goal in life is to save children from falling off a cliff, just as he wants to save himself from falling into adulthood. This is a really crazy answer. It has no basis in reality.



Phoebe realizes that **Holden** has misheard the words to a Robert Browning poem. She explains that the actual line from the poem is "If a body meet a body coming through the rye."

The correct poem refers to a sexual encounter. Holden hears what he wants to hear: an innocent version.



Holden thinks about calling up **Mr. Antolini**, his former English teacher at Elkton Hills.

With his fantasy gone, Holden looks for a new escape.



Chapter 23

Holden calls **Mr. Antolini**. Upset that **Holden** has been expelled from another school, **Mr. Antolini** invites **Holden** to come stay at to his house. **Holden** describes **Mr. Antolini** as the best teacher he ever had. **Mr. Antolini** was the only person who even went near **James Castle's** body after he jumped out the window.

Mr. Antolini represents Holden's last hope: an adult he respects as non-phony, who, unlike other adults, tried to be a Catcher for James Castle. That's what Holden's looking for, someone to Catch him.



Holden convinces **Phoebe** to dance with him, but their parents come home. **Holden** hides in the closet until his mother tucks **Phoebe** in. After his mother leaves, he emerges and tells **Phoebe** of his plan to head out west. She gives him all her Christmas money (\$8.65). He refuses to take it at first, then insists that she take his red hunting hat in exchange.

Phoebe thinks Holden is acting crazily, but doesn't judge. She supports him. She isn't phony. Holden handing over his hunting hat is symbolic: he's trying to protect his sister, and giving up protection for himself.



Chapter 24

Mr. Antolini has just had a party, and his apartment is full of glasses and dishes. Yet he welcomes **Holden**, and his wife heads off to make some coffee.

The party symbolizes society; it's what Mr. Antolini can give Holden.



Mr. Antolini questions **Holden** about his expulsion from Pencey and tells Holden that his father is very concerned about him. When Holden says he hates Pencey's rules and rigidity, Mr. Antolini points out that it can sometimes be more interesting to follow the rules and see what happens.

Unlike other adults, Mr. Antolini doesn't throw phony catch phrases at Holden. He explains his point of view. Like Phoebe, he doesn't let Holden get away with his usual evasions.



After Mrs. Antolini brings coffee and heads to bed, **Mr. Antolini** says he's worried that **Holden** is heading for a "terrible fall" that will result in a life of bitterness. Holden protests, but Mr. Antolini continues: the "fall" Holden seems to be heading for results when a man expects more from his environment than it can possibly offer him. He adds that mature people live humbly for realistic causes, while immature people seek to die for unworthy ones. Finally, he says that the feelings tormenting Holden are part of the human condition and have plagued countless young people.

Mr. Antolini doesn't phrase his advice in terms of success. He understands that Holden thinks of success as phony, and that Holden isn't necessarily wrong to think that way. Instead, he tries to show the effects that Holden's alienation and too-high expectations have on Holden's happiness. Mr. Antolini also connects happiness with being a part of things, with responsibility and humility.



Holden does his best to listen, but eventually his tiredness makes him yawn. **Mr. Antolini** makes his bed, and Holden falls asleep.

Is Holden's tiredness legitimate, or another tactic of preserving his alienation?



Suddenly **Holden** wakes. He feels **Mr. Antolini's** hand brushing his forehead. Mr. Antolini says he was just "admiring" Holden, but Holden is convinced it was some kind of homosexual overture. He says he forgot to collect his suitcase from a locker in Grand Central and leaves.

Holden has been anxious about homosexuality from the beginning of Catcher, making it difficult to guess what Mr. Antolini is doing. Is Holden right or wrong? It's never entirely clear.



Chapter 25

In Grand Central Station, **Holden** sleeps on a bench. He says he never felt more depressed than at this moment. He thinks about **Mr. Antolini** and wonders if he possibly misunderstood his intentions.

Even Holden, now suffering depression from his alienation, wonders if he was right about Mr. Antolini's intentions.



As **Holden** walks down Fifth Avenue, he remembers shopping there with **Phoebe**. A sudden fear comes over Holden that he'll fall off the curb and not make it to the other side of every street he tries to cross. He begs **Allie** to protect him, and starts fantasizing about moving out West, living alone, and talking to no one.

Holden's panic attacks are of "falling," a reference to his Catcher fantasy and his fear of both growing up and dying. He tries to make Allie, his brother whose death trapped him forever in childhood, his Catcher.



Important Quotes

Chapter 2 Quotes

"Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules."

"Yes, sir. I know it is. I know it."

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 3 Quotes

[Ackley] took another look at my hat while he was cleaning them. "Up home we wear a hat like that to shoot deer in, for Chrissake," he said. "That's a deer shooting hat."

"Like hell it is." I took it off and looked at it. I sort of closed one eye, like I was taking aim at it. "This is a people shooting hat," I said. "I shoot people in this hat."

Chapter 5 Quotes

My brother Allie had this left-handed fielder's mitt. He was left-handed. The thing that was descriptive about it, though, was that he had poems written all over the fingers and the pocket and everywhere. In green ink.

Chapter 8 Quotes

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?

Chapter 16 Quotes

The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. You could go there a hundred times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish, the birds would still be on their way south, the deers would still be drinking out of that water hole, with their pretty antlers and their pretty, skinny legs, and that squaw with the naked bosom would still be weaving that same blanket. Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be you.

Chapter 22 Quotes

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

He decides to see **Phoebe** one last time. He leaves a note at her school asking her to meet him at the Museum of Art. In the school, he notices that someone has scrawled "Fuck You" on the wall. **Holden** tries to erase the words, and says he'd like to kill the person who wrote them.

The scrawled curse words anger Holden because he can't stand to see children corrupted, though he's been using coarse language all through the novel.



While waiting for **Phoebe** at the Museum of Art, **Holden** tries to help some kids find the room with the mummies, but the kids get scared and run off. He then notices another "Fuck You" written on the wall of the hallway. He predicts that even his tombstone will have "Fuck You" written on it. He feels ill, and in the bathroom he faints. When he revives he goes outside to wait for Phoebe.

It's ironic that Holden scares the children he's trying to help, and a sign that something is really wrong with him. At the same time, he's clearly not able to understand the seriousness of his mental distress. He comments on his fainting as if it's nothing.



Phoebe shows up at the museum and begs **Holden** to take her with him out West. He refuses, which makes her furious. He starts to feel faint again. When she angrily returns his **hunting hat**, he promises not to go away at all. She remains angry, even when he offers to take her to the zoo.

Phoebe, a child, accepts Holden's scheme. In doing so, and in giving back his "protective" hat, she forces Holden to protect her. And to protect Phoebe, Holden has to give up his alienation and be realistic.



At the zoo, **Holden** convinces **Phoebe** to take a ride on the carousel, which plays the same song it played when he was a kid. Phoebe gives Holden back his **red hunting hat** and he puts it on as rain starts to fall. The hat protects him, and he watches Phoebe on the carousel. He feels so happy he could cry.

Phoebe on a carousel is an image of childlike innocence. Holden has "caught" her from coming west with him. In the process, he also "caught" himself. Yet the intensity of his joy indicates he still might not be "cured." Phoebe and the symbolic hunting hat shield Holden from his depression and looming adulthood.



Chapter 26

Holden ends the novel by refusing to say what happened after the carousel other than that he got sick and was sent to the rest home he currently occupies. He mentions that a psychoanalyst asked him if he'll apply himself when he returns to a new school in the fall. Holden says he thinks so, but adds that you won't know what you're going to do until you do it.

The end of Catcher in the Rye is ambiguous. Holden is still evasive, and still refuses to commit to applying himself, but his flexibility about what he's going to do may hint that he's growing up and his adolescent rage is lessening.



In fact, **Holden** says that he now wishes that he hadn't talked so much about what happened to him, and wishes he'd said less to **D.B.**, who often comes to visit him. Holden advises readers not to tell their own stories, because it will just make them miss everyone they tell about. He even misses **Ackley** and **Stradlater** now.

More ambiguity: is Holden's wish he hadn't talked about his story continued evasion? Is missing people a sign he's giving up his alienating hatred of others? Holden has always been contradictory and independent. His path from here is up to him.



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 24 Quotes

This fall I think you're riding for — it's a special kind of fall, a horrible kind. The man falling isn't permitted to feel or hear himself hit bottom. He just keeps falling and falling. The whole arrangement's designed for men who, at some time or other in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn't supply them with. Or they thought their own environment couldn't supply them with. So they gave up looking.

Chapter 25 Quotes

[W]hile I was sitting down, I saw something that drove me crazy. Somebody'd written "Fuck you" on the wall. It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how they'd wonder what the hell it meant, and then finally some dirty kid would tell them....I hardly even had the guts to rub it off the wall with my hand, if you want to know the truth. I was afraid some teacher would catch me rubbing it off and would think I'd written it. But I rubbed it out anyway, finally.

ThemeTracker™

The LitCharts ThemeTracker is a mini-version of the entire LitChart. The ThemeTracker provides a quick timeline-style rundown of all the important plot points and allows you to track the themes throughout the work at a glance.

Themes	Chapter	
	1	From a "rest home" Holden begins his story: Expelled from his school, Pencey Prep for failing most of his classes, he goes to say goodbye to his history teacher, Mr. Spencer , rather than attend the Pencey football game.
	2	Mr. Spencer tells him that life is a game and he should play by the rules. The lecture strikes Holden as "phony." Holden evades Mr. Spencer's questions about getting expelled from other prep schools, and wonders to himself where the ducks in the Central Park lagoon go during the winter.
	3	Ackley barges into Holden's dorm room. Holden describes his red hunting cap as a "people-shooting hat." Stradlater arrives, and announces he has a date.
	4	Holden learns Stradlater's date is with Jane Gallagher . Holden agrees to write Stradlater's English essay.
	5	Holden writes Stradlater's essay about Allie's baseball mitt. Holden mentions that he punched a glass window on the night that Allie died.
	6	Stradlater returns, reads the essay Holden wrote, and then rebukes Holden for never doing anything "the way you're supposed to." Stradlater also refuses to reveal any details of his date with Jane . Holden attacks Stradlater. Stradlater bloodies Holden's nose.
	7	Ackley won't let Holden sleep in his room. Tormented by the thought of Stradlater and Jane having sex, Holden leaves Pencey..
	8	On the train to New York City, Holden meets Ernest Morrow's mother and lies to her about who he is.
	9	Holden decides not to call D.B. , Phoebe , or Sally . On the way to the Edmont Hotel, he asks the cabbie where the ducks in the Central Park lagoon go in the winter. At the Edmont Hotel, Holden , lonely, thinks of calling Jane but instead calls Faith Cavendish .
	10	Holden describes Phoebe , and says she's the only person who truly understands him. But he doesn't call her. Holden goes to the hotel bar. He dances with, and hates, Bernice Krebs . He lies and says he just saw the movie star Gary Cooper.
	11	In the hotel lobby, Holden thinks of the summer he spent with Jane when he was younger. He mentions that Jane is the only person to whom he ever showed Allie's baseball mitt. Depressed, he leaves the hotel to go to Ernie's, a bar.
	12	On the way to Ernie's, Holden asks the cabbie where the ducks in the Central Park lagoon go in the winter. Holden finds the scene at Ernie's phony. He avoids Lillian Simmons by leaving the bar.
	13	Holden walks forty-one blocks back to the Edmont Hotel, where the elevator operator Maurice offers to send him a hooker for five dollars. Holden accepts, but he can't bring himself to sleep with the prostitute when she arrives. He pays her five dollars, but she insists he owes her ten and leaves angry.
	14	Maurice demands the additional five dollars, has the hooker take the money, then punches Holden in the stomach. Afterward, Holden thinks about committing suicide. Finally, he goes to sleep.
	15	Holden makes a date with Sally Hayes . At Grand Central Station he talks with two nuns and donates \$10 to them.
	16	Holden buys a children's record for Phoebe , then while walking on the street hears a boy singing, " If a body catch a body coming through the rye. " Holden goes to the Museum of Natural History to look for Phoebe , but decides not to go inside once he arrives and instead heads for his date with Sally .
	17	Holden takes Sally to see a play. He thinks the play and a boy that Sally talks with at intermission are phony. Holden keeps describing himself as being crazy. Holden and Sally go ice-skating, then sit inside. Holden shouts that he hates everything and then suggests they run away. She refuses. He insults her and she starts to cry. Holden apologizes, then laughs, and leaves.
	18	Holden thinks about calling Jane again, but instead calls Carl Luce . While waiting to meet Luce, he goes to see a war movie and thinks that if a war were to start he would volunteer to sit on an atomic bomb..
	19	At the bar where they meet, Holden asks Carl Luce about Luce's sex life. Luce responds that Holden needs to grow up and see a psychoanalyst. Holden insults Luce, who leaves.
	20	Holden gets drunk, thinks about calling Jane , and instead calls Sally . The phone call goes disastrously. Then Holden goes to find the ducks in Central Park. The ducks have flown away. Holden accidentally drops the record he bought for Phoebe. He cries and contemplates suicide, but decides to go see Phoebe .
	21	Holden sneaks into his family's apartment and watches Phoebe sleep. He looks through her school books and delights in her drawings. Holden wakes up Phoebe . She starts to tell him about her life, then figures out that he must have gotten expelled and hides her head beneath a pillow.
	22	Holden tries to explain to Phoebe why he flunked out of Pencey. Phoebe challenges him to name one thing he likes. He says Allie and talking to Phoebe. She says that doesn't count, because Allie is dead. Phoebe asks Holden what he wants to be. He tells her about the catcher in the rye . She realizes that Holden misheard the actual words of the poem.
	23	Holden calls Mr. Antolini , who invites him to stay at his house. Holden then tells Phoebe about his plan to go to Colorado. She gives him all her Christmas money, and in return he gives her his hunting hat .
	24	Mr. Antolini says that he's worried that Holden is headed for a "terrible fall." Holden falls asleep, but wakes suddenly as Mr. Antolini strokes his forehead. Holden thinks this is a homosexual overture, and leaves.
	25	Holden decides to go out west. He notices the words "Fuck You" scribbled on a wall of Phoebe's school, and then again at the Museum of Art. Phoebe asks to go west with Holden . He refuses, and she angrily returns his hunting hat . Holden then promises not to go either. Phoebe rides the carousel. Holden sits and watches her, wearing his red hunting hat which protects him from the rain that has just begun to fall, and feels so happy he almost cries.
	26	From the rest home, Holden says he wishes he hadn't told his story because now he misses everyone in it.

Theme Key

- Phoniness
- Alienation and Meltdown
- Women and Sex
- Childhood and Growing Up
- Madness, Depression, Suicide