The Catcher in the Rye

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF J. D. SALINGER

Jerome David Salinger grew up on Park Avenue in Manhattan. 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 to 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 in writing he had done since his early teens. During World War II, Salinger ended up in the U.S. 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 lived until his death in 2010. In his final years, he continued to avoid contact with the media, and ceased publishing any new works.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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 City, 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, and 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" and shallow 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," but World War II proved that this claim was as hollow as the "phony" ideas that adult characters force upon Holden throughout *The Catcher in the Rye*.

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 the novel is written in such a fresh and unique voice with a degree of candor and brashness perhaps unprecedented in American fiction. Having said that, similar themes arise in books like John Knowles's 1959 novel, *A Separate Peace*, which, much like *The Catcher in the Rye*, is a coming-of-age novel set against the backdrop of an East Coast prep school. *The Catcher in the Rye* is ranked among other great coming-of-age stories such as James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*. Furthermore, it's worth mentioning that Salinger published a short story that mentioned Holden Caulfield six years before *The Catcher in the Rye* appeared as a book. The story was published by *Esquire* under the title "This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise," and suggests that Holden eventually goes "missing-in-action" as an adult. This information precedes the novel's focus on Holden Caulfield's depression and suicidal thoughts as he navigates the grey area between childhood and adulthood, similar to books like *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, *The Virgin Suicides* by Jeffrey Eugenides, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, which all focus heavily on mental illness. Though initially intended for adults, *The Catcher in the Rye* has become an iconic book for young-adult audiences due to its teenage protagonist and themes of alienation, identity, mental health, and growing up, which resonate with adolescents. It has served as an inspiration for innumerable YA works such as John Green's *Looking for Alaska*, which is also about a disillusioned teenager at a boarding school; Ned Vizzini's *It's Kind of a Funny Story*, which centers on a suicidal young man who checks himself into a mental health ward; and Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, whose protagonist, like Holden, is a high school student who recounts the events that lead up to his mental breakdown.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Catcher in the Rye
- **When Published:** 1951
- **Literary Period:** Modern American
- **Genre:** Bildungsroman
- **Setting:** Agerstown, Pennsylvania and Manhattan, New York in 1950
- **Climax:** After he wakes up to find Mr. Antolini stroking his forehead, Holden jumps up and hastily leaves Mr. Antolini's apartment.
- **Antagonist:** Stradlater, phonies, adulthood, and change

EXTRA CREDIT

The Censor in the Rye. Many critics dismissed the book as trash due to its healthy helping of four-letter words and sexual situations, and even as recently as 2010, *The Catcher in the Rye* was banned in school districts in Washington, Ohio, Florida and Michigan.

Film Rights. Although many directors and screenwriters have wanted to adapt *The Catcher in the Rye* as a film over the years, J.D. Salinger never sold the rights, thus making it impossible for the movie to be made.

PLOT SUMMARY

Writing from a rest home where he's recuperating from an unidentified ailment, Holden Caulfield says he'll tell the story of what happened to him just before the previous Christmas. Holden's story begins at his school, Pencey Prep, on the day of an annual football game that all of the students normally attend. Instead of going to the game, Holden, who has just been expelled for failing four of his five classes, visits Mr. Spencer, his elderly history teacher. Mr. Spencer lectures Holden by agreeing with what the headmaster, Dr. Thurmer, has already told him—namely, that life is a game which ought to be played by the rules. This, Spencer insists, is an important thing to internalize as Holden plans for his future. As he listens, Holden pretends to agree with Mr. Spencer, but actually thinks that his teacher is something of a "phony." As the conversation continues, Mr. Spencer forces him to read aloud an unsatisfactory essay he wrote about the Ancient Egyptians, and this makes Holden resent him, since he already knows that he didn't put enough effort into the assignment. Consequently, he lies and says that he has to leave to collect his things, though he simply returns to his dorm room to read.

Once he's back in his room, Holden is confronted by his irritating neighbor, Ackley, who interrupts him as he tries to read. Later, his conceited and good-looking roommate, Ward Stradlater, bounds into the room. When Holden asks why he's returned so early from the football game, he reveals that he's on a date with a girl named Jane Gallagher. This catches Holden off guard, since he knows Jane Gallagher—he spent time with her when she lived next-door to him two years ago when his family summered in Maine. As Stradlater prepares for his date, Holden goes on at length about Jane, explaining small details about her personality. As he speaks, it becomes clear that he's quite attached to his memories of Jane, but Stradlater only cares about whether or not he'll be able to have sex with her. This unnerves Holden, but he doesn't say anything and even agrees to do Stradlater's English homework for him while he's gone. The assignment is to write short descriptive essay, so Holden choses to write about his dead brother Allie's baseball mitt.

Hours later, Stradlater returns from his date. Holden has been on-edge ever since he left, wondering what Stradlater was doing with Jane. Instead of answering Holden's questions about the date, though, Stradlater reads what Holden has written and criticizes him for not following the rules, claiming to have told him that the essay had to be about a place or a house. Offended and angry, Holden snatches the composition and rips it to pieces. He then presses Stradlater for details about his date with Jane. This tense conversation makes him even angrier, so he punches Stradlater and calls him a moron. Because he's bigger, though, Stradlater quickly gets the best of him, but this doesn't stop Holden from calling him a "moron," prompting Stradlater to knock him once and for all to the ground.

In the aftermath of his tussle with Stradlater, Holden decides to leave Pencey early, planning to stay in New York City until after his parents receive the news that he has been expelled, since he doesn't want to be home when they learn this. Gathering his things, he turns before exiting the dorm building and yells, "*Sleep tight, ya morons!*" He then takes a train to New York, flirts with a middle-aged woman on the way, and rents a room at the Edmont Hotel when he arrives. Before long, he feels lonely and depressed and starts acting strangely. Going downstairs to the hotel's nightclub, he dances with a woman named Bernice Krebs who is completely uninterested in him, instead wanting to spend time with her two friends. Nonetheless, Holden is undeterred, taking pleasure in how good of a dancer she is. However, he soon tires of Bernice and her friends because he thinks they're "phony," so he decides to take a taxi to a piano bar he used to frequent with his older brother, D.B. On his way, he wears a **red hunting cap** he recently bought and asks the cab driver what happens to **the ducks in the Central Park lagoon** during the winter, but the driver only tells him that he should care more about the fish, since they have to stay in the frozen water. All the same, the driver insists that nature takes care of the fish, urging Holden not to worry about such things.

After an unexciting time at the piano bar, Holden returns to the hotel and takes the elevator back to his room. On the way, the elevator operator, Maurice, offers to send a prostitute to his room for $5. Holden agrees, but is so uncomfortable when the prostitute, Sunny, actually arrives that he says he can't have sex because of a recent surgical operation. Hearing this, she demands $10, but he only pays her $5 he and Maurice agreed upon. Shortly thereafter, Sunny returns with Maurice, who punches Holden in the stomach while Sunny takes another $5 dollars from his wallet.

The next morning, Holden makes a date with a girl he has dated in the past named Sally Hayes. He isn't particularly fond of Sally's personality, but she's quite attractive. Plus, he's lonely and simply wants company. In an ideal world, he would call Jane Gallagher, but every time he considers contacting her, he

decides that he isn't in the right "mood." With time to kill before his afternoon date with Sally, then, he wanders around town, eventually hearing a boy sing a song while coming out of church: "If a body catch a body coming through the rye," the youngster sings, touching Holden with his innocent voice and the beauty of the song. Hoping to find his younger sister, **Phoebe**, Holden walks all the way to **the Museum of Natural History**, thinking that her class might be there on a fieldtrip. On his way, he thinks about how much he loves the museum because its exhibits never change. A person can go time and again, he thinks, and the only thing that will change over time is the individual visiting the exhibits. When he finally reaches the museum, though, he finds himself unable to enter, so he takes a taxi to meet Sally Hayes.

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." Afterwards, they go ice-skating, but Holden has a hard time enjoying this outing, wondering the whole time whether or not Sally only wanted to go skating because she knew she'd be able to wear one of the skimpy dresses the rink lets girls wear while they're on the ice. Once they finish skating, they go into a bar-restaurant near the rink, and Holden begins to talk about everything he hates. He even asks Sally to run away with him to a cabin in New England, dreaming of a life of total freedom. Unfortunately for him, though, this fantasy comes crashing down on him when Sally refuses his invitation and asks him to stop shouting. Frustrated, he insults her by calling her a "royal pain in the ass." When Sally begins to cry and asks Holden to leave, he gladly obliges, though he feels extremely depressed after this terrible interaction.

After spending time with Sally, Holden calls a former classmate named Carl Luce. Luce is three years older than him and goes to Columbia, and though Holden never actually liked him, he asks him if he wants to have dinner together. Uninspired by this invitation (because the last time Holden saw Luce, Holden called him a "phony"), Luce agrees to meet him late that night for drinks. When he arrives, though, he declares that he doesn't want to have a "typical Caulfield conversation," but Holden is incapable of restraining himself because he has had multiple scotch and sodas. As a result, he asks Luce a number of intrusive questions about his sex life, eventually driving him away, at which point Holden walks to Central Park to look at the ducks in the lagoon. There are no ducks, it's freezing, and he imagines his own death, which he knows would make Phoebe miserable. Thinking along these lines, he decides to go home to see her.

Holden sneaks into his family's apartment, wakes up Phoebe, and tells her he's leaving to go live on a ranch in Colorado. Phoebe realizes Holden has been expelled, as he was from his former schools, and admonishes him for once again disappointing his parents—though she doesn't do this in a way that particularly bothers him. She then asks what he wants to do in life, and 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 that he has been envisioning recently.

While he's home, Holden calls Mr. Antolini, his favorite teacher who used to teach English at Elkton Hills, Holden's former school. Mr. Antolini is upset to hear that Holden has been kicked out of school once again, but he tells him to come over right away if he wants. Before Holden leaves, he gives Phoebe his red hunting hat and then sneaks out of the apartment, making his way to Mr. Antolini. When he arrives, Mr. and Mrs. Antolini greet him fondly, and Mr. Antolini sits with him in the living room to talk about his life. As they discuss his future, Holden begins to feel quite sick, but he tries to listen as Mr. Antolini warns him 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 to really absorb what Mr. Antolini is telling him, so Mr. Antolini sets up a place for him to sleep on the couch. Shortly thereafter, Holden abruptly wakes up and feels Mr. Antolini's hand stroking his head. Thinking that Mr. Antolini is doing something "perverted," he leaves.

After sleeping in Grand Central Station for a couple of hours, Holden decides to say goodbye to Phoebe before heading West. To do this, he goes to her school and gives an administrator a note to pass to Phoebe—a note that explains that he will meet her at the Museum of Art to say goodbye before he leaves. After delivering this note, he makes his way to the museum and has a tender moment with two young boys as tells them about the mummies in the Egyptian section. However, his lack of sleep and food (and his excessive intake of alcohol the night before) begin to catch up to him, and he passes out in the bathroom. Thankfully, though, he wakes up and goes back to the lobby to find Phoebe, who has arrived with a large suitcase. She informs him that she will be coming with him, and this forces him to see how absurd his plan is. Instead of following through with this idea, he takes Phoebe to the zoo and watches her ride a carousel. Between rides, she gives him back his hunting hat and he promises that he won't be going West.

Holden's story shifts back to the rest home, where he's undergoing psychoanalysis. He says that he doesn't know whether he'll apply himself when he returns to school, and he wishes he hadn't told so many people the story of his expulsion from Pencey, since doing so has made him miss the people he talked about.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Holden Caulfield – The novel's narrator and protagonist, Holden is a high school junior who has flunked out of prep

school several times. He is from New York City, where his younger sister, Phoebe, still lives with his parents. Holden also has a deceased younger brother, Allie, and an older brother, D.B. On the brink of 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 novel opens with Holden recuperating from an undisclosed ailment in a rest home, and he tells the reader that he will relay the "madman stuff" that happened to him just before last Christmas. His story begins shortly after he learns that he has failed out of his most recent school, Pencey Prep. Wanting to bid this chapter of his life a proper farewell, he visits his elderly history teacher, Mr. Spencer, who tells him to heed the headmaster's advice to play the game of life by the rules. This idea frustrates Holden, who thinks it's absurd to approach life with such a narrowminded worldview. That night, he discovers that his roommate, Ward Stradlater, is going on a date with Jane Gallagher, a girl whose family lived in the neighboring house two years ago when Holden's family summered in Maine. Since then, Holden has built up an image of Jane as a perfect woman, which is why he finds himself distraught by the idea that Stradlater might try to have sex with her. When Stradlater returns, Holden picks a fight with him before deciding to leave Pencey that instant, packing his bags and leaving Pennsylvania for New York City without another thought. For the next several days, Holden makes his way through the city, posing as an adult, drinking scotch and sodas, encountering prostitutes, and calling up old acquaintances like his on-again-off-again girlfriend, Sally Hayes. He also meets up with his old mentor, Carl Luce, sneaks into his family's apartment to see Phoebe, and spends the night at the house of his old English teacher, Mr. Antolini. But every time Holden reaches out to someone from his past, he ends up alienating them and going off on his own again, wishing all the while that he could work up the courage to call Jane. The lofty plans he makes for the future also fall through as he physically and mentally deteriorates over the course of a few days in the city. In the end, Holden has a mental breakdown, which occurs some time before he begins writing his story. By the novel's conclusion, he is facing depression and struggling with the harsh inevitability of growing up.

Phoebe Caulfield – Phoebe is Holden's younger sister. Though only 10 years old, she is considerably more mature than Holden, though Holden actually covets her because of her youthful innocence. She is a voice of reason throughout the novel, both in Holden's thoughts and in the advice she gives to him in person. For example, when he sneaks home in the middle of the night to talk to her, she gently admonishes him for failing out of Pencey before encouraging him to drop his relentless cynicism and figure out what, exactly, he wants to do with his life. Indeed, Phoebe is unusually perceptive, and her insight into Holden's misanthropy—his hatred of almost everything—forces him to introspectively examine the way he views the world. In keeping with this, it is because of Phoebe that he finally decides to assume a sense of responsibility. This happens when Phoebe decides that she's going to come with him after he declares that he's going to move out West. Her decision makes him see that this is an absurd idea, and because he doesn't want to ruin his sister's life, he finally starts thinking levelheadedly about his own choices. On another note, it's no coincidence that perhaps the most even-keeled and intelligent character in the novel is a child, since Holden idealizes childhood and values children's opinions more than those of adults. Phoebe's intelligence and wise counsel therefore offer a strong contrast to the lectures he receives from his various teachers and headmasters, whom he resents.

Mr. Antolini – Holden's former English teacher from Elkton Hills, Holden's old school. Mr. Antolini is 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 engage with Holden without letting him get away with any of his usual tricks of evasion. When Holden needs a place to stay on his last night of roaming New York City, he calls Mr. Antolini, and though it's quite late, Mr. Antolini tells him to come over as soon as he wants. When he arrives, he sees that Mr. Antolini and his wife, Mrs. Antolini, have just finished having a party. Mr. Antolini is a bit tipsy, but this doesn't stop him from sitting down with Holden and talking to him about his expulsion from Pencey. Before long, he begins to lecture Holden, but what he says differs from the standard advice that people like Mr. Spencer have already imparted to him. Instead of talking about Holden's repeated failures, Mr. Antolini says that he's worried about Holden because he thinks he's headed for a life of disillusionment and bitterness. Not wanting the young man to continue closing himself off to life's many wonderful possibilities, he urges Holden to drop his cynicism, saying that such pessimistic mindsets aren't worth clinging to in life. Rather than dooming himself to a miserable existence or self-destruction, Mr. Antolini tells Holden that he should instead make an active effort to better himself. Unfortunately, though, Mr. Antolini ruins his sound advice by later stroking Holden's head while the boy sleeps on his couch. Holden wakes up to find his former teacher standing before him and touching his brow, prompting him to jump up and leave as fast as he can, thinking that Mr. Antolini is a "pervert." Of course, it's never clear whether or not Mr. Antolini's actions were sexually motivated, but it *is* clear that his behavior was inappropriate. At the very least, his strange affection has the negative effect of forcing Holden to second-guess their relationship and, thus, everything Mr. Antolini has told him.

Jane Gallagher – Jane is a girl Holden met while summering in Maine two years before the events of *The Catcher in the Rye*. A kind young woman, Jane goes to a different private school than Holden, which is why Holden is surprised when his roommate, Ward Stradlater, tells him that he's going on a date with her. As

Stradlater prepares for this date, Holden tells him about his fond memories of Jane, explaining that Jane's parents are divorced and that she lives with her mother and alcoholic stepfather. Later in the novel, Holden tells a story about trying to make Jane feel better after a seemingly meaningless exchange with her stepfather made her cry. Although Holden and Jane never did more than hold hands, Holden fixates on the relationship they had, idealizing Jane as the perfect woman. For this reason, he tries to work up the courage to call her throughout his time in New York City, though he can never bring himself to actually talk to her because he's afraid that doing so will ruin the perfect image he's created of her, and of their connection.

Ward Stradlater – Stradlater is Holden's roommate at Pencey Prep. A popular and good-looking young man, Stradlater is confident but kind. Although Holden recognizes that his roommate is rather conceited, he also knows that Stradlater is the sort of person who would give another student his own tie if that student complimented it. Holden's neighbor, Ackley, on the other hand, can't stand Stradlater because he thinks he's a pompous jerk. And though Holden disagrees at first, he can't help but see Ackley's point when he learns that Stradlater is going on a date with Jane Gallagher. Beside himself, Holden talks at length about Jane as Stradlater prepares for the date, but Stradlater doesn't seem to care about any of the quirky little details Holden mentions about Jane's personality. Rather, Holden can sense that Stradlater is only interested in having sex with Jane—an idea that sets Holden on edge. When Stradlater returns from his date and refuses to tell Holden everything that happened, Holden picks a fight with him. Because Stradlater is much bigger, he easily wins, though this doesn't stop Holden from persisting in calling him a "moron." It is this fight that finally inspires Holden to leave Pencey once and for all, setting off for New York City in the middle of the night.

Robert Ackley – Ackley is a student who lives in the adjoining room to Holden and Stradlater's room at Pencey Prep. A peculiar and rather annoying young man, Ackley has terrible personal hygiene, bad skin, and unclean teeth. For this reasons, not many people like him, and Ackley's behavior doesn't help this situation, since he often lingers and acts like he dislikes people even though it's obvious he wants them to pay attention to him. This is what he does to Holden on Holden's last night at Pencey Prep. When Holden and Stradlater get into a fight, Holden retreats into Ackley's room just because he wants some company, but he finds himself too annoyed by Ackley's presence to remain in the room, so he decides to leave Pencey Prep and travel on his own to New York City.

Sally Hayes – Sally Hayes is a beautiful young woman whom Holden has dated in the past. Like Holden, Sally goes to a private school, but her school lets out for winter break earlier than Pencey, which is why she's able to meet Holden in New York City when he calls her. Despite this invitation, though, Holden doesn't truly respect Sally, though he finds her attractive and thus decides to spend time with her. Still, he has trouble enjoying himself when he's in her presence, since she uses phrases that annoy him and likes things that he finds shallow and pointless. For instance, he gets frustrated with her because she likes a play that they see together on Broadway, though he also tells her on this date that he loves her—an excessive display of emotion that pours forth from him simply because he's eager for human interaction. After the play, Sally suggests that they go ice-skating, but this outing only turns into an argument when Holden tries to explain his cynical worldview to her. Unlike him, Sally thinks that people should follow rules in life, an idea that so thoroughly upsets Holden that he calls her a "royal pain in the ass" before leaving.

Allie Caulfield – Allie is Holden's deceased younger brother. Allie died of leukemia when Holden was 13, and the memory of this loss still haunts Holden, who remembers his brother as intelligent, calm, and friendly—in short, the perfect child. On the night Allie died, Holden slept in the garage and punched out all the windows with his bare hand, causing him to miss the funeral because he needed to go to the hospital. In the aftermath of this event, his parents wanted to have Holden psychoanalyzed, but apparently never followed through with this idea. Having never resolved his feelings about Allie, then, Holden thinks about him quite frequently and even calls upon him as a protector of sorts when he feels particularly depressed.

D.B. Caulfield – D.B. is Holden's older brother. A former army soldier who fought in World War II, D.B. is an author best known for his short stories, which Holden deeply admires. However, D.B. has recently started writing movies in Hollywood, which displeases Holden, who thinks his brother has sold out and is now practicing something close to prostitution. D.B. is the person who visits Holden most frequently when he's in the rest home.

Mr. Spencer – Mr. Spencer is Holden's elderly history teacher a Pencey Prep. When he hears that Holden has flunked out of school, Spencer invites him to his house and tries to motivate him to "play by the rules"—a piece of advice that Dr. Thurmer, the headmaster, has already imparted to Holden. During this visit, Holden is horrified by Mr. Spencer's physical state, since Spencer is sick when he arrives. Because of this, Holden has to sit on the Dr. Thurmer's bed and look at him while the old man pontificates in his bathrobe. This unsettles Holden because he hates the idea of growing up, associating aging with negative kinds of change. Worse, Mr. Spencer makes Holden feel ashamed for failing history, though only because he feels bad that Spencer—whom he likes—had to fail him, since Holden can tell that the old man didn't want to do this.

James Castle – James Castle is a student Holden knew when he was still attending Elkton Hills. Holden has an odd respect

for Castle because Castle committed suicide by jumping out of his window after refusing to submit to a group of bullies who locked Castle and themselves with in Castle's room. For some reason, Holden thinks of Castle when Phoebe asks him to name just one thing he genuinely likes—a sign that he admires both Castle's unwillingness to give in to bullies and the fact that he committed suicide, which is something Holden himself often thinks about.

Faith Cavendish – Faith is a former burlesque stripper, and somebody whom Holden only knows through word of mouth. Having heard that Faith is sexually promiscuous, he calls her late at night when he arrives in New York City. At first, she is angry that a stranger has woken her up, but she eventually tells Holden that she's willing to meet him for a drink the following day. As soon as she offers this, though, Holden says he won't be in town by then and hangs up.

Carl Luce – Three years older than Holden, Luce was Holden's student mentor at the Whooton School. During this time, he often regaled Holden and other students with stories about sex. Holden still remembers the way Luce used to be able to identify whether or not a person was gay, a skill Holden found quite impressive even if he secretly thought that Luce himself might be gay. During one of his lonelier moments in New York, Holden decides to call Luce even though he doesn't necessarily even like him. In fact, the last time he saw him, he called him a "phony" to his face, which is perhaps why Luce is cold and removed when he eventually agrees to meet Holden at a bar late that night—an encounter that ends with Luce calling Holden immature and suggesting that he see a psychoanalyst.

Maurice – The elevator operator at the hotel where Holden stays on his first night in New York, who turns out to be a pimp—Maurice offers to send a prostitute to Holden's room for $5. Hesitant at first, Holden agrees, though he doesn't actually have sex with the prostitute, Sunny, when she arrives. Nonetheless, he gives her $5, but she tells him he owes her a grand total of $10. When he refuses, she leaves, but she returns shortly thereafter with Maurice, who punches Holden in the stomach because he calls him a "moron," at which point Sunny takes the extra $5 from his wallet.

Sunny – Sunny is a teenage prostitute who visits Holden's room at the Edmont Hotel. Although Holden told Maurice—Sunny's pimp—that he wanted a prostitute, he loses his nerve when Sunny actually arrives. For this reason, he asks if she'd simply like to talk, but this strikes her as odd. Before long, he tells her that he can't have sex because he recently had an operation, but he still pays her the $5 that he and Maurice originally agreed upon. However, Sunny claims that the total is actually $10. Holden refuses to pay this, but Sunny later returns with Maurice and takes the extra money from Holden's wallet while Maurice punches him in the gut.

Horwitz – Horowitz is a taxi driver who takes Holden from the Edmont Hotel to Ernie's piano bar. On the way, Holden asks him where **the ducks in the Central Park lagoon** go during the wintertime, but Horowitz scoffs at him for worrying about them, saying that the fish have it worse than the ducks, since they have to remain in the frozen water. But even the fish, he says, are always fine, since nature takes care of them. He then urges Holden to trust nature.

Bernice Krebs – Bernice is a young woman Holden meets in the Lavender Room, the nightclub inside the Edmont Hotel. Bernice is there with two friends and is uninterested in Holden, though she agrees to dance with him when he asks. Before long, Holden gets annoyed with Bernice and her friends because they're obsessed with the prospect of spotting movie stars in the city, but he continues to pass the time with them until they leave, sticking him with the bill and not even offering to pay for the drinks they had before he arrived.

Ernest's Mother (Mrs. Morrow) – Ernest Morrow's mother is an attractive middle-aged woman whom Holden meets on the train to New York after leaving Pencey Prep. Mrs. Morrow instantly recognizes the Pencey seal on Holden's suitcases, so Holden gives her a fake name and then speaks fondly of her son, whom he actually hates. Nonetheless, he finds Mrs. Morrow quite pleasant and even flirtatiously invites her to have a cocktail with him, though she politely declines.

Ernie – Ernie is a talented piano player who has his own bar in New York City. Holden has been to this bar with D.B. in the past, so he decides to visit once more when he reaches the city after leaving Pencey. When he arrives, though, he hates how many "phonies" are there, including D.B.'s ex-girlfriend Lillian, and also dislikes the showboating way that Ernie plays the piano.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lillian Simmons – Lillian Simmons is a young woman who used to date Holden's brother, D.B. Holden runs into her at Ernie's piano bar but makes up an excuse so that he doesn't have to sit with her and her date, since he thinks she's an insufferable "phony."

Dr. Thurmer – The headmaster of Pencey Prep, Dr. Thurmer tells Holden that life is a game with rules that everyone must follow. Holden repeats this to Mr. Spencer, who agrees with the advice and launches into a lecture, much to Holden's dismay.

Ernest Morrow – Ernest Morrow is a boy Holden considers to be the "biggest bastard" at Pencey, though this doesn't stop him from speaking very fondly about him when trying to flirt with Ernest's mother, whom he meets on the train to New York.

Mal Brossard – Mal Brossard is one of Holden's friends at Pencey Prep. On Holden's last night at the school, Mal goes with him and Ackley to the movies, though they actually end up playing pinball instead.

Mrs. Antolini – Mr. Antolini's wife. Mrs. Antolini cleans up the

mess from a party while Mr. Antolini and Holden have a frank discussion in the Antolinis' living room.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PHONINESS

In J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, a novel about a teenager's many frustrations with the world, 16-year-old Holden Caulfield constantly encounters people and situations that strike him as "phony." This is a word he applies to anything hypocritical, shallow, inauthentic, or otherwise fake. He sees such "phoniness" everywhere in the adult world, and believes adults are so superficial that they can't even recognize their own insincerity. And though Holden feels this skepticism most prominently toward the adults in his life, he's often horrified to find that even his teenaged peers embody the same lack of authenticity as his teachers and other authority figures. What he doesn't seem to recognize, though, is that he is often rather phony himself, since he frequently lies and misrepresents himself. More importantly, he uses his judgmental attitude to avoid failure or emotional pain, choosing to be apathetic about schoolwork and his relationships so that he doesn't have to apply himself. In this way, he uses his hatred of phoniness as a crutch, allowing him to reject anything that presents itself to him as a challenge. In the end, this attitude leads him to little more than lonely hopelessness, hinting that his expectations for the world are unrealistic and self-destructive.

In many ways, Holden is right that the people around him are frustratingly inauthentic. For instance, his sensitivity to adult phoniness enables him to recognize that the headmaster of Elkton Hills (one of the schools he attended before his current school, Pencey Prep) only pays attention to the parents of rich students. Every Sunday, Holden explains, Mr. Haas shakes hands and speaks with visiting parents, but Holden notices that he all but ignores families who aren't wealthy. After giving poorer families a "phony smile," he talks to rich parents for as long as half an hour. Despite this discrepancy, Mr. Haas presents himself as a kind, welcoming, and polite man. In reality, though, Holden sees that he's nothing but a social climber who only cares about people if they have money. This, Holden claims, is one of the primary reasons he left Elkton Hills, insisting that he was "surrounded by phonies" at the institution. In turn, readers sense just how much Holden cares about whether or not the people around him are genuine in the way they present themselves.

Although Holden is correct that many people aren't as kind or earnest as they'd like others to think, it's worth noting that he himself is often quite hypocritical. In fact, he admits early in the novel that he's very good at "shooting the bull," claiming that he can easily trick people into thinking he's invested in something when he actually isn't. When he goes to his history teacher's house to say farewell before he leaves Pencey, for example, he tells Mr. Spencer that he appreciates how hard it must be to be a teacher. In contrast to this sentiment, though, what he really believes is that "you don't have to think too hard when you talk to a teacher," since it's so easy to trick them. In turn, it becomes clear that Holden is more than willing to be dishonest and inauthentic, and that he thinks it's easy to dupe other people because they themselves are so phony. However, he is perhaps less persuasive than he might think, considering that Mr. Spencer quickly cuts him off and asks him pointed questions about what he *really* feels. In this moment, readers see that Holden can be just as phony as anyone else, though he refuses to admit it. In this sense, then, his criticism of other people's inauthenticity distracts him from his *own* phoniness.

Near the end of the novel, Holden's former English teacher, Mr. Antolini, tries to help him see how unproductive it is to fixate on the many ways in which people are phony. Although Holden might be right that the world is full of inauthentic people, he uses this as an excuse to not apply himself in school. Similarly, his cynicism puts a strain on his relationships, as evidenced by the fact that he once called his friend Carl Luce a "fat-assed phony," which unsurprisingly drove them apart. He also ruins his connection with Sally Hayes by calling her a "royal pain in the ass" because she doesn't agree that the world is made up of shallow people who set useless expectations for young people. Trying to help him see that this pessimistic view of the world is unhelpful, Mr. Antolini warns Holden that some men think that "their environment [can't] supply them with" what they need to be happy, so they give up looking for it before they even give themselves a chance to find it. In other words, Holden is so fixated on the idea that society is superficial and fake that he convinces himself that it's pointless to follow the rules. By making this decision, he stops himself from even *trying* to succeed in life. Consequently, it's apparent that his obsession with phoniness ultimately works against him, keeping him in a perpetual state of cynical apathy that deprives him of happiness, progress, or satisfaction.

ALIENATION AND MELTDOWN

Early on in *The Catcher in the Rye*, it's clear that Holden doesn't fit in. After all, he decides not to attend his school's big football game with the rest of his peers, a sign that he tends to sequester himself from others. What makes *The Catcher in the Rye* unique, however, is not the fact that Holden is an alienated teenager, but the novel's nuanced portrayal of the causes, benefits, and costs of

his isolation. Simply put, alienation both protects and harms Holden. On one hand, it ensures that he'll never have to form connections with other people that might end up causing awkwardness, rejection, or the sort of intense emotional pain he felt when his brother, Allie, died. On the other hand, though, this very same instinct estranges him from the kind of connection all humans need in order to lead happy lives. In keeping with this, Holden 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. As a result, he reaches out to people but then finds himself incapable of letting them fully engage with him on an emotional level. In turn, he becomes trapped in a cycle of self-destruction: his fear of human contact leads to alienation and loneliness, which encourages him to reach out to others, which excites his fear of human contact, which causes him to shut down, which leads once more to alienation. By drawing attention to this pattern, Salinger illustrates that while alienating oneself from others can turn into a vicious cycle.

Holden makes a point of separating himself from his peers. He does this in multiple ways, some of which are more subtle than others. For instance, even his manner of dressing indicates his desire to be set apart from everyone else, as he wears an eccentric **hunting hat** that separates him from people like Stradlater, who would never wear such unique or unconventional attire. He also purposefully alienates himself from Stradlater because he can't bring himself to speak openly about how he feels. Angry and jealous that Stradlater went on a date with Jane (his longtime crush), Holden antagonizes his roommate until they finally come to blows. Shortly thereafter, Holden vindictively fixes his hunting cap on his head and storms out of the dorm, yelling, *"Sleep tight, ya morons!"* With this, he sets off on his own, bidding his classmates a harsh farewell that underscores just how eager he is to insulate himself from his peers. Acting like he doesn't need anybody but himself, he sets off on an untethered solo journey through New York City.

Although Holden is committed to proving how little he needs others, his loneliness soon overtakes him. Desperate for company, he makes multiple attempts while in New York to connect with people like his childhood girlfriend, Sally Hayes, and his former student mentor, Carl Luce. In both cases, though, he ends up behaving abrasively, apparently uncomfortable with the idea of simply relating to others. When Holden inevitably drives both Sally and Carl away, he once again begins to feel sad and alone, and this causes him to think about his dead brother, Allie. As a result, he decides to go home so that he can speak to perhaps the only person he actually likes—his little sister Phoebe. However, because he's determined to set himself apart from the rest of his family, he's unable to stay with Phoebe when his parents come home that night. Yet again, then, his decision to isolate himself interferes with his ability to find genuine human connection, thereby cementing the pattern of alienation that makes him feel so unhappy and lonely.

It's worth pointing out that Holden largely experiences alienation because he *chooses* to ostracize himself from others. At the same time, though, Salinger suggests that Holden slowly begins to lose his ability to decide whether or not he wants to feel isolated. In other words, Holden becomes so used to distancing himself from others that he eventually finds it nearly impossible to shake his feelings of ostracization. This is the case when he visits Phoebe's school at the end of the novel. At first, he relishes the familiarity of the school, which he himself used to attend. As he sits on the steps, he feels a vague sense of belonging. Just then, though, he looks at the wall and sees that somebody has graffitied "Fuck you" onto it. Suddenly, he feels as if the whole world is against him, thinking that somebody will probably write the same phrase on his gravestone when he dies. Instead of seeing this vandalism as nothing more than an act of immaturity, he lets it ruin his newfound sense of belonging, clearly feeling that the phrase is aimed directly at him. He responds so negatively to this because he has voluntarily alienated himself for too long. As a result, he has become used to seeing himself in opposition to the world. It is for this reason that Salinger implies that it's risky to isolate oneself from human connection, since doing so makes it that much harder to fight off loneliness and emotional turmoil.

WOMEN AND SEX

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, J.D. Salinger uses Holden Caulfield's thoughts about women and sex to illustrate the young man's naivety. More specifically, Holden's romantic and sexual expectations reveal his tendency to idealize certain unrealistic notions. For instance, he thinks of Jane Gallagher as a perfect woman, despite the fact that he can't even bring himself to call her on the phone. Having idealized her in this way, he looks down on seemingly all the other women he encounters, seeing them as annoying and unintelligent simply because he compares them to Jane, holding them to an unreasonably high standard. In this way, he makes it impossible for himself to be happy with any of his romantic partners. Worse, he can't bring himself to reach out to Jane because he senses that even *she* won't live up to the idea he's built of her in his mind. This, in turn, reveals his tendency to romanticize impractical notions, which enables him to ignore the many limitations of reality. Through Holden's ambivalence toward women and sex, Salinger suggests that holding such impossibly high standards for sexual and romantic relationships ultimately paralyzes people and prevents them from finding meaningful connections.

Holden's confidence when it comes to romantic relationships emerges early in the novel, as he refers to himself as a "sex maniac." However, this confidence isn't quite as sturdy as one might expect, which becomes clear when Holden can't contain

his jealousy after Stradlater goes on a date with Jane Gallagher. Unbeknownst to Stradlater, Holden has had a crush on Jane for quite some time, though he hasn't seen her for a while. Interestingly enough, though, it is exactly *because* Holden hasn't seen Jane for a while that he becomes so upset. Indeed, Holden has idealized Jane in the time since he last saw her, eventually coming to think of her as the embodiment of a perfect woman. When Stradlater goes on a date with her, then, Holden is overcome with jealousy, hating the idea of Stradlater—who he knows is sexually forward with his dates—trying to have sex with Jane. Although he wants to present himself as a cool and sexually experienced young man, he finds it impossible to hide his feelings when Stradlater returns from the date and refuses to talk about it. As Holden gradually loses his temper, readers see that his self-image as a confident womanizer with many lovers is little more than an act, since he has obviously fixated on just *one* woman.

Ironically, Holden can't bring himself to reach out to Jane despite his strong feelings for her. He tells himself throughout the novel that he should call her, but he always stops himself because he isn't in the right "mood." Instead of actually interacting with her, then, he merely *thinks* about her. Consequently, his idea of her (and of his relationship with her) takes on the quality of a mere fantasy, ultimately causing him to elevate her even more than he already has. As he fixates on how great Jane is, he thinks disparagingly about young women like Sally Hayes, with whom he actually has a romantic relationship. Although Holden finds Sally attractive, he thinks of her as "phony" and annoying. In keeping with this, his entire conception of her is quite condescending, but this doesn't stop him from getting wrapped up in the idea of running away with her. In the same way that he idealizes Jane Gallagher, he romanticizes his relationship with Sally, choosing to overlook his lack of respect for her in order to invest himself in a far-fetched fantasy about moving to Vermont with her. When Sally rejects this idea, his scorn for her returns with a vengeance because her rational response forces him to confront his own naïveté—something he is quite hesitant to do.

Above all, Holden wants a romantic partner who will validate the way he feels. This is why he gets so angry when Sally forces him to see how ridiculous his plan to move to Vermont really is. Of course, Sally's reaction to his ludicrous fantasy is exactly the kind of levelheaded perspective he needs, but Holden is unwilling to admit this, so he lashes out at her. In this manner, he cuts himself off from emotional and romantic intimacy because he has cultivated unrealistic expectations for both the people he respects and the way he views his life. Accordingly, he finds himself alone and unable to sensibly envision not only his love life, but also his future.

CHILDHOOD AND GROWING UP

The Catcher in the Rye is a portrait of a young man at odds with the process of growing up. A 16-year-old who is highly critical of the adult world, Holden covets what he sees as the inherent purity of youth. This is why the characters he speaks most fondly about in the novel are all children. Thinking that children are still untainted by the "phony," hypocritical adult world, he wishes there were a way to somehow preserve the sense of honest integrity that he associates with childhood. Consequently, he not only dreams about protecting children from the trials and tribulations of growing up, but also resists his own process of maturation. At the same time, though, he frequently tries to present himself as much older than he actually is, posturing as an adult even when it's obvious that he's a teenager. Interestingly enough, these unsuccessful forays into the adult world ultimately force Holden into situations that make him seem even more immature than he should be at his age. To that end, it is precisely because he disastrously thrusts himself into adult situations that he comes to fear maturity so much. As Holden vacillates between romanticizing youth and imitating maturity, then, Salinger presents a study of a young man who has trouble simply living in his own skin, and suggests that both resisting adulthood and forcing oneself to grow up before one is truly ready are detrimental to an individual's development.

Holden's affinity for children is made evident by the way he talks about his little sister, Phoebe. He sees Phoebe as the perfect person, someone uninfluenced by the adult world, which he thinks has a corrupting influence. Unlike adults, Holden thinks, Phoebe will never pretend to be something she's not, and she always understands exactly what he's trying to say. The fact that he so thoroughly appreciates her ability to understand him is worth considering, since it suggests that he feels perpetually misunderstood by the adults in his life. After all, even his adult mentors—Mr. Spencer and Mr. Antolini—try to lecture him in ways that only annoy him. Indeed, even when he *does* connect with adults, they always say or do something to bother him, and he begins to hate their phoniness. For instance, he likes his older brother D.B., but can't stand that he decided to move to Hollywood to write movies. According to Holden, this is a waste of talent. Failing to see that D.B. is most likely writing movies because it's a way to be financially responsible as a writer, Holden resents him and sees his decision to move to Hollywood as proof that adults make deplorable, unrespectable choices. With this in mind, he idealizes people like Phoebe and Allie (his dead brother) instead, appreciating them because he can't imagine them making the same choices as people like D.B.

What's strange about Holden's positive feelings toward Phoebe is that he appreciates the very traits that distinguish her as a sophisticated and mature child. Whenever he fondly reflects upon her ability to understand him, he's actually just celebrating her advanced conversational skills, as well as her

emotional intelligence. In keeping with this unacknowledged appreciation of maturity, Holden himself often tries to act much older than he really is, despite the misgivings he has about the adult world. For example, he frequently invites middle-aged adults for "cocktails," flirts with older women, makes plans to get married in the woods of New England, and lies about his age. The fact that he behaves this way undermines all the negative things he says about adult hypocrisy, since it's clear that he himself is often hypocritical, effectively wanting to disparage the adult world while also trying to enter it. This, it seems, is most likely why he idealizes childhood so much, since he has so much trouble actually playing the role of a mature adult. In fact, the majority of his attempts to posture as an adult end in disaster, like when he tries to have sex with a prostitute but suddenly doesn't feel up to the task—a situation that doubtlessly makes him feel quite young. Because of his repeated failure to present himself as an experienced adult, then, he romanticizes childhood, seeing children as pure and innocent because they—unlike the adults in his life—will readily accept him.

Because Holden's unsuccessful forays into the adult world give him such a scornful idea of what it means to grow up, he comes to see adulthood as something that corrupts purity and innocence. With this regressive mindset, he sees the process of maturation as something of a travesty, which is why he eventually tells Phoebe that all he wants to be in life is the "**catcher in the rye**," or a person who catches children when they're in danger. This is a fairly abstract thought, but it's worth considering because it indicates Holden's desire to save children—and himself—from adulthood. He tells his sister that he has recently been picturing a group of children running around in a field of rye. In this field, he says, there is some sort of cliff, and he's standing at the edge of this cliff. When the children are about to fall off, Holden catches them, thereby saving them from destruction. This serves as a metaphor for Holden's belief that children must be saved from the various pitfalls of growing up. Because he himself has experienced some of the difficulties of getting older, he thinks he can help people like Phoebe preserve their innocence. However, it's obvious that nobody can do anything to stop themselves from growing up, and Holden's form of delusional self-protection can only last so long—after all, he *will* get older and *will* have to face things like sex, intimacy, and death. And though he himself refuses to acknowledge this, readers see that it's just as futile to resist growing up as it is to prematurely posture as an adult.

MADNESS, DEPRESSION, SUICIDE

The Catcher in the Rye examines the fine line between everyday teenage angst and serious depression or unhappiness. Throughout the novel, Holden refers to himself as a "madman," calls himself crazy, and frequently declares that he is depressed. At first, these statements seem somewhat trivial, since Holden tends to exaggerate. In addition, his claims about how much he dislikes his life sometimes seem rather undeserved, since he's actually quite privileged. After all, he comes from a wealthy family, has a loving sister, and has no shortage of opportunity, so it's sometimes hard to understand what he has to be upset about. As the novel progresses, though, the depths of his discontent become all the more apparent, and his persistent ruminations about death and suicide begin to indicate that he's dealing with emotions that are more troubling than the average dissatisfaction that most adolescents experience. By scrutinizing the difference between ordinary discontent and true depression, then, Salinger gives an account of the delicate nature of mental health, making it clear that unhappiness exists on a complex, nuanced spectrum, and that it's possible to be depressed even while leading a seemingly fortunate life.

Right away, Holden gives readers the impression that he's a cynical teenager who has a bitter overall outlook on life. He begins his story by saying, "If you really want to hear about it," a phrase that underscores his sarcastic, sneering attitude. With this mentality, he frames the story he's about to tell as nothing more than a crazy sequence of events, something to be related because it's entertaining in a morbidly fascinating way. Strangely enough, this trivializes his entire account, allowing him to portray his unhappiness as something casual instead of treating it seriously. Asserting that he's not going to talk much about his personal history, he decides to narrate "this madman stuff that happened" to him. By calling the content of his story—which readers soon learn is rather depressing—"madman stuff," Holden admits that what happened to him was rather out of control, but he does so in a hyperbolic way, thereby diminishing its impact. Instead of acknowledging the fact that he is currently telling this story from an unidentified rest home where he's receiving psychoanalysis (which he reveals at the end of the novel), he begins his tale as if it's little more than a wild anecdote one might tell a group of friends to make them laugh. In doing so, he presents himself as an average teenager dealing with everyday problems.

One of the first indications that Holden's internal emotional world is more turbulent than he lets on comes when he tells the story of Allie's death. Holden was 13 when Allie died, and his response to his brother's death was quite severe—upon learning that Allie died, he spent the night in the garage, where he punched out all the windows with his bare hand. Of course, it makes sense that he would be beside himself, but this strong reaction is worth noting because it suggests he has trouble dealing with difficult emotions. More importantly, his parents wanted to have him psychoanalyzed in the aftermath of this event, but for some reason they seem to have decided against this. This, in turn, means that Holden has most likely never fully processed the difficult feelings that arose after Allie's death.

Having never properly dealt with his feelings about Allie's death, Holden finds himself thinking about his brother in moments of pronounced loneliness. Throughout his three-day solo stint in New York City, he frequently experiences feelings of depression and isolation, and during one of these moments he even speaks out loud to Allie, addressing his deceased younger brother simply to make himself feel less alone. As he does so, it becomes increasingly clear that the nature of his discontent isn't simply related to the typical teenage angst he experiences, but to something more profound—namely, his unaddressed feelings of grief regarding Allie's death.

What is perhaps most alarming about Holden's depression is that it tends to lead him to suicidal thoughts. For instance, shortly after speaking out loud to Allie, he remarks, "What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide." Even if he doesn't follow through with this, the mere fact that his feelings of depression and grief eventually inspire this thought is troubling, especially since he makes multiple comments like this one. Although it's true that it's common for teenagers (and, in fact, *all* people) to feel depressed or upset, not everyone lingers on thoughts of death and suicide the way Holden does. In fact, he even seems to *fantasize* about suicide, which is a troubling sign because it underlines just how fixated he is on the idea that death might be a way to solve his problems. And yet, he doesn't attempt suicide in the novel. This creates a sense of ambiguity, inviting readers to consider the nature of Holden's depression—it's unclear whether he will someday act on his dark thoughts and actually kill himself. However, it *is* clear that Holden struggles with both ordinary and more severe forms of unhappiness, since some of his discontent resembles the everyday angst most people experience at some point in their lives, whereas other forms of his unhappiness have to do with his unprocessed grief. By bringing this dynamic to light, Salinger considers the many nuances of depression, ultimately implying that certain kinds of discontent ought to be addressed even if unhappiness is an unavoidable and universal part of life.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the 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. This image is symbolic of his desire to save both himself and other children from having to experience the various hardships and perils of the adult world. In the same way that he himself doesn't want to grow up, he wants to help preserve youthful innocence by saving other people—like his younger sister Phoebe, for instance—from the inevitable changes that come along with aging. The fact that Holden bases this image of himself as the "catcher in the rye" in "Comin' Thro' the Rye," a song he overhears, is significant because he actually misremembers the lyrics. Although he thinks that the song (which is based on a poem by the 18th-century poet Robert Burns) goes, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye," it actually reads, "If a body *meet* a body coming through the rye." To that end, the lyrics are ironically about promiscuous sexual encounters, as Burns is writing about having clandestine but casual sex in a field. Holden's naïve misinterpretation of these lyrics, then, underscores both his desire to shield children from the adult world *and* just how innocent he himself is when it comes to adult matters.

HOLDEN'S RED HUNTING HAT

Holden's red hunting hat is a symbol of his self-identification and alienation. More specifically, it's a manifestation of the fact that he often purposefully isolates himself from people, going out of his way to separate himself from his peers and superiors. Throughout the novel, he wears the hat in strange contexts, clearly unafraid to stand out. Although it's a hunting hat, he wears it indoors and in the city, where there's no chance that he'll be going on a hunting expedition. He does this because he feels as if the hat protects him, making him feel unique and thereby helping him define himself. A young man struggling to figure out who he is and where he fits in the world, he imbues the hat with meaning beyond its intended function, using it as a way to aid his identity formation. At the same time, though, the hat also singles him out as strange and, in doing so, reinforces the idea that he can't quite seem to blend in with the rest of the world. He gives the hat to his younger sister, Phoebe, before he plans to leave New York for a new life, a gesture that indicates both that he considers Phoebe to be one of the few people who understands him for all his quirks. Phoebe ultimately gives the hat back, however—in the same way that Holden can't bring himself to follow the various social codes that make up everyday life, it seems that he cannot rid himself of his strange hat. In this regard, then, the hat also becomes a symbol of his inability to shed his immaturity and his childish reluctance to embrace adulthood.

THE DUCKS IN THE LAGOON IN CENTRAL PARK

Holden's fixation on the ducks in the Central Park lagoon represents his fear of change. When he worries about where the ducks go during the wintertime, he finds himself unsettled by the idea that they have to alter their lives in order to survive. What he fails to realize, though, is that they *aren't* altering their lives, since seeking out warmer environments is simply part of their migration pattern and, thus, doesn't

represent any kind of change for them. In fact, that the ducks always return to the lagoon in warmer weather should actually comfort Holden, since it suggests that certain things really do stay the same even if change is an inherent part of life. Nevertheless, Holden is too concentrated on the idea that the ducks have to adapt in order to stay alive, so he remains unable to see the flaws in his thinking. In turn, the ducks become an embodiment of the tunnel-vision Holden gets when he starts to obsess about change and the future.

THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

If the ducks in Central Park represent Holden's fear of change, then the Museum of Natural History represents the comfort he takes in the idea of constancy or stasis. He has been visiting the museum ever since he was a child, and though he himself has changed, he knows he can count on the displays staying the same. In this way, then, the Museum of Natural History becomes one small aspect of his life that isn't subject to the relentless march of time.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Little, Brown edition of *The Catcher in the Rye* published in 2001.

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.

Related Characters: Mr. Spencer, Holden Caulfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

When Mr. Spencer advises Holden to see his life as a game, Holden pretends to affirm the sentiment. But in reality, he believes this worldview is only helpful to those who already hold positions of relative advantage. The disconnect between Holden's external speech and his interior monologue marks his distance from adult society. His spoken language is polite and submissive, using the term "sir" and repeating with subservience. "I know it is. I know it," he says, as if he does not have any additional thoughts. Yet when the narration shifts to his mind, the reader sees a very different tone, one that immediately challenges the idea Spencer has expressed. "My ass," Holden thinks, going on to pick apart what his teacher has just said. In this way, Holden's internal thoughts are at odds with the way he presents himself to others.

Holden's specific contention with Mr. Spencer's point is worth considering: he finds the thoughts of empowered adults irrelevant because their advice only applies to those in parallel positions of power—the ones "on the side where all the hot-shots are." That is to say, the metaphor of the "game" implies a mindset that presumes one can actually dictate the rules. Holden does not simply say that he is disadvantaged in the game, however, but rather denies the entire metaphorical system. With the use of interior monologue, he rejects the worldview foisted upon him by others and sets the stakes of his own existence.

Chapter 3 Quotes

[Ackley] took another look at my hat [...]. "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."

Related Characters: Robert Ackley, Holden Caulfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

As Holden sits in his room reading, his neighbor Ackley arrives and teases him for wearing the hunting hat. In response, Holden adopts an aggressive and morbid attitude.

Holden's red hat plays an important symbolic role throughout the text—as an image of both independence and of ridicule. Here, it is primarily the second, for Ackley claims that Holden is out of place for wearing a hunting hat in the dorm room. This disconnect stresses how Holden refuses to conform to the structured setting of his school: his clothing belongs in a freer, more rural setting. When nonconformity makes him an object of derision for Ackley, Holden becomes oddly morbid: that the hat becomes "a people shooting hat" might be a mere jest, but when Holden reiterates, "I shoot

people in this hat" the tone grows more serious. Lighthearted as the scene might appear, it also carries the dark suggestion that Holden would be willing to harm other humans—treating them as flippantly as he would a deer. The hat thus symbolizes Holden's misanthropic status both due to the manner in which its out-of-context appearance alienates him from others and to the way he turns the hat into an unsettling—though sardonic—threat.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ I was only thirteen, and they were going to have me psychoanalyzed and all, because I broke all the windows in the garage. I don't blame them. I really don't. I slept in the garage the night he died, and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it...It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Allie Caulfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Holden describes his aggressive reaction to his brother Allie's death. He notes that his behavior was irrational, but also defends himself based on the unique connection he had with Allie.

This interplay of reason and unreason is mediated by Holden's parents' response to his actions. That they wanted to have him "psychoanalyzed" after his aggressive behavior would strike the reader as entirely rational given their position—and Holden affirms this sympathetic interpretation when he says "I don't blame them. I really don't." He then offers evidence of how this choice would be reasonable by reiterating how ludicrous his behaviors would have seemed. In particular that he acts "just for the hell of it..." highlights his own awareness of his lack of rational motivation.

A turn comes, however, when Holden says, "I hardly didn't even know I was doing it," indicating that he should be absolved from the guilt of the mania because he was not conscious of his actions. His next defense—"you didn't know Allie"—is of a rather different nature, for it relies not just on the reader's ignorance, but implies that his aggressive response was actually reasonable, considering how much he cared about his brother. Beyond continuing to humanize Holden—and implying that his current psychological issues are the result of a lost brother—this passage showcases Holden's fraught relationship with his own behavior. In this way, Salinger illustrates how people manage to defend rash actions even as they accept how others would view their conduct as inappropriate.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ 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!" I'll bet I woke up every bastard on the whole floor. Then I got the hell out.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Ward Stradlater

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

In the aftermath of his fight with Stradlater, Holden decides to leave Pencey and travel to New York City. As he leaves, he experiences a round of intense emotions, followed by an aggressive renunciation of all those who remain at Pencey.

Salinger makes this passage a parody of departure narratives: the packing of bags, the moment of reflection, and the crying are all aspects of classic departures. Yet when Holden realizes that he doesn't know why he is crying, he subtly denies that his emotional responses are part of this normal emotional arc. Perhaps he does feel some sadness at leaving a comfortable environment, but the emotion he experiences seems to stem more from his disillusionment and frustration with this "phony" society than from anything else.

More than anything, Holden uses his red hunting hat to distinguish himself from society. In the same way that he wants to separate himself from his peers at Pencey, he wears the hunting hat backwards as a way of setting himself apart from society at large. Indeed, he wears it as a form of self-affirmation, ultimately reminding himself that he can behave the way he wants. That renunciation of normal social codes comes to a climax when he yells, "Sleep tight, ya morons"—a parody of the farewell phrase, "sleep tight," since

he actively wakes everyone up by shouting this. In this moment, Holden shows himself not just to be mentally distant from and critical of those around him, but also willing to openly renounce and mock those he deems phony.

Chapter 9 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?

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Holden asks his cab driver about the Central Park ducks. Though the question is earnest, the driver does not take him seriously.

On the surface, Holden's question seems ridiculous, or even sarcastic, thus showing that his occasional earnest statements are rebuffed by a society that expects social acts to be relatively artificial. Here, we get a sense of why Holden sees others as phony: they demand such a practiced and coded type of social interaction that they're apparently incapable of direct and meaningful conversation. The inability of Holden's cab driver to answer his straightforward question speaks to this disconnect.

More specifically, the ducks are a symbol of Holden's worry about change: he is concerned about the fate of the ducks in the changing season, just as he is anxious about the changes in his own life. That Holden wonders about the ducks' winter lodgings demonstrates his attention to beings that have been abandoned—and implies that he has a similar worry for himself now that he's left the safe haven of Pencey Prep and is on his own in New York City. In a sense, Holden is just like the ducks: uncertain of where to go now that he has entered a harsh adult world. Consequently, his interest in the ducks of Central Park is directly related to his fear of change, growing up, and responsibility.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ 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. Something always happens...I came quite close to doing it a couple of times, though. One time in particular, I remember. Something went wrong, though—I don't even remember what any more.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Maurice

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 120

Explanation and Analysis

Holden accepts an offer from the elevator operator, Maurice, to have sex with a prostitute. As a result, he reveals his anxiety over being a virgin and recounts his botched attempts to have intercourse.

Holden's tone shifts markedly here into a confessional mode. There is an implied listener in his phrasing, as made evident by his statement, "If you want to know." This implies that Holden sees himself as speaking earnestly to a judgmental audience. The following lines are similarly defensive and self-critical: he affirms that his lack of sexual experience isn't due to the fact that women aren't interested in him, for he has had "quite a few opportunities." Rather, it seems to stem from some personal fear or insufficiency, though Holden is unable to articulate just what this is. Though he can remember "one time in particular," he cannot or chooses not to recall it with any specificity. Consequently, the reader is left only with the paltry information that "something went wrong."

As is characteristic of Salinger's writing, this passage causes the reader to empathize with Holden, even as it also casts him in an unlikable and unreliable light. His hiring of a prostitute marks a lack of morality, but this saddened reflection on virginity shows him at his most vulnerable. Salinger implies that Holden's earlier brazen behavior is just a front to hide his insecurity about his ability to perform sexually—and his resulting relative lack of experience.

❝ The trouble was, I just didn't want to do it. I felt more depressed than sexy, if you want to know the truth. *She* was depressing. Her green dress hanging in the closet and all. And besides, I don't think I could *ever* do it with somebody that sits in a stupid movie all day long. I really don't think I could.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Sunny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

When Sunny (the prostitute Holden requested) comes to Holden's room, his fear of sex develops into depression and paralysis. As a result, he declines to have sex and here explains that the refusal comes from how sad the entire situation makes him.

This moment clarifies the occasions Holden referred to earlier, when he could have lost his virginity. It shows that in such instances he becomes distraught by the depressing circumstances of the interaction. Sexual interest alone is insufficient to make him pursue sex, and Holden thus seems to be in pursuit of something more meaningful. One should note, however, that Holden's response is not based on any kind of ethical principle. (He would likely find such moralizing to be "phony.") Rather, it is based on an immediate emotional response—as well as on the appearance of the scene in which he finds himself. Holden, above all, is disheartened by the physical detail of Sunny's "green dress," which—in its prettiness—only emphasizes his inability to become sexually aroused in these circumstances. Furthermore, Holden has just learned that Sunny spends the majority of her daytime hours going to the movies, something he finds abhorrent because he finds cinema "phony." For this reason, he finds it difficult to respect Sunny, who clearly likes the cinema.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ It took me quite a while to get to sleep—I wasn't even tired—but finally I did. What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide. I felt like jumping out the window. I probably would've done it, too, if I'd been sure somebody'd cover me up as soon as I landed. I didn't want a bunch of stupid rubbernecks looking at me when I was all gory.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Maurice, Sunny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

After Sunny takes his money and Maurice punches him in the stomach, Holden tries to fall asleep. He considers suicide, but decides against it because of an imagined social response. This passage shows Holden at the depths of his despair. Whereas his earlier comments have certainly conveyed depression and angst, contemplating suicide marks a significant shift and a deepening of his discontent. In fact, he doesn't even try to hide this emotional change, explicitly stating his desire to commit suicide by "jumping out the window." What stops him from acting, though, is not an ethical belief or rational consideration, but a fear of how he might seem to others if he actually killed himself. Here, what he finds most depressing isn't the idea of losing his life, but what strangers might think about him if they saw him when he looked "all gory." That this odd consideration is what he keeps him from following through with his suicidal impulses is quite unsettling, since it suggests that he might actually go through with such actions if he ever manages to stop caring about how he presents himself to the world—something that, though Holden is obsessed with self-presentation, might actually happen if he matures or stops thinking about himself in terms of how he fits into society.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ I got up close so I could hear what he was singing. He was singing that song, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." He had a pretty little voice, too. He was just singing for the hell of it, you could tell. The cars zoomed by, brakes screeched all over the place, his parents paid no attention to him, and he kept on walking next to the curb and singing "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." It made me feel better. It made me feel not so depressed any more.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

As Holden walks by a church, he hears a boy singing the tune for which the novel has been named. He finds in this moment a source of endearing and heartening purity that contrasts his otherwise disheartening existence.

When Holden refers to the tune as "that song," he shows himself to be already familiar with it—indicating that it has a nostalgic effect. Though the meaning of the song's central image is not yet clear, we can already see in the phrase "catch a body" that it describes one "body" supporting

another. Furthermore, the words "through the rye" summon a rural environment that opposes the harsh city, while the hypothetical "if" gives the song a dreamy quality. It seems to exist in an idyllic alternate universe, one that brings Holden a sense of real peace.

What Holden finds particularly moving, however, is less the content of the song than the way in which the boy sings it. Specifically, he does so "for the hell of it": entirely for himself and with no regard to his surroundings. The boy, then, epitomizes the kind of earnest poeticism that Holden identifies with Allie, and which also opposes the phony adult society that acts solely based on social recognition. It is no coincidence, then, that Holden has this spiritual moment near a church, for the catcher symbol is something of a psalm or incantation for the lost Holden.

❝ She was a very nice, polite little kid. God, I love it when a kid's nice and polite when you tighten their skate for them or something. Most kids are. They really are. I asked her if she'd care to have a hot chocolate or something with me, but she said no, thank you. She said she had to meet her friend. Kids always have to meet their friend. That kills me.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Phoebe Caulfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

In Central Park, Holden asks a little girl where Phoebe might be. As they part ways, he gives this odd, nostalgic reflection on childhood. In doing so, he adopts an adult perspective, observing the actions of kids as pure and admirable.

For the most part, Holden's critical eye has been primarily oriented toward adult society, as he remains cynical of the "phoniness" of grown-ups and their seemingly arbitrary obsessions or concerns. However, he now adopts the perspective of an adult who gazes from a distance on the behavior of the young. His repeated invocation of "kid," particularly in the generalized plural "kids," implies that Holden considers himself outside of this group, looking upon children from the high perch of adulthood. Indeed, his ability to make general statements about how "most kids are" implies that he has gathered enough information about their behavior to make an objective and universal statement.

Holden's reflection speaks to the earnestness he values about childhood. When the girl says she has to meet a friend, she adopts adult language, which Holden finds quite comical even though he might find the same behavior artificial were it to come from a peer or an adult. In this context, he relishes the young girl's sophistication, finding her mannerisms charming and genuine. This is particularly interesting because Holden himself often postures as someone much older than he actually is, and he also cherishes Phoebe's precociousness. Consequently, it's fair to say that he actually gravitates toward some of the hallmarks of adult maturity even as he constantly disparages the vapidity of the adult world.

❝ 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.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Phoebe Caulfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

As he considers visiting the Museum of Natural History, Holden contemplates the permanency of the exhibits. He is comforted that they stay the same in the face of his own ever-shifting life.

This passage brings up the question of aging and adolescence within the novel: the reader must wonder why Holden would find it meaningful that "everything always stay[s] right where it [is]" in the museum. His use of the word "nobody" in the phrases, "Nobody'd move," and, "Nobody'd be different," indicate that Holden associates actual people in his life with the inanimate exhibits before him. (Otherwise he would say "nothing" instead of "nobody.") In turn, it becomes clear that the consistency of the museum's exhibits comforts him because he has had to deal

with the loss of his brother, Allie, which has only served to remind him of life's unstable and fleeting nature.

In addition to representing stability, the museum also serves as a way for Holden to visualize his own identity formation. In saying, "The only thing that would be different would be you," Holden implies that he values the ways in which the museum's constancy ultimately sheds light on the ways in which he himself has changed. That is to say, a museum becomes a useful barometer in assessing one's own maturation and development. In this regard, Salinger shows Holden to have, despite his tendency for rashness, a desire for both stability and introspection.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ Then, just to show you how crazy I am, when we were coming out of this big clinch, I told her I loved her and all. It was a lie, of course, but the thing is, I *meant* it when I said it. I'm crazy. I swear to God I am.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Sally Hayes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Holden and Sally travel to the theater in a cab, and Holden finds himself acting increasingly irrational. As the taxi jolts forward, they kiss each another in the backseat, and Holden professes his love for Sally, internally claims that the statement is a lie, and then defends why he told this lie.

Salinger continues to construct a complicated, self-contradictory psyche for Holden. He seems capable of telling a "lie" that is also true, since he genuinely meant what he said about loving Sally when he first declared these feelings. This disparity points out the fickleness of human behavior, a factor that Holden despises in others but continues to encounter in himself. He describes such volatile emotions as an indication of lunacy—"I'm crazy"—but what his sudden affection actually stems from is his excitement about having finally made a connection with somebody else. Although he doesn't particularly like Sally very much, he has been trying throughout the novel to meet up with people (and especially women) so that he can benefit from their company. Finally, then, he gets what he wants while kissing Sally, which is why he erupts with this overly-affectionate declaration.

❝ "You ought to go to a boys' school sometime. Try it sometime," I said. "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."

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Sally Hayes

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

It is difficult to know what to make of Holden's comments here. On one hand, they might simply speak to his depressive nature, reaffirming that he finds everything in his world meaningless. On the other, one could identify a cultural critique in Holden's words. Indeed, there is something artificial about the narratives that places like high-achieving boys schools perpetuate. After all, the idea that everyone should be working toward someday owning a Cadillac is fairly superficial, since having a nice car isn't a true indication of whether or not a person has led a good or meaningful life. Holden is articulating, in immature language, a genuine criticism of society at large. His focus on communal rituals (such as football games) and empty discussions ("all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day") is similarly poignant and incisive, even if he struggles to articulate what he means. Many readers may empathize with the feeling that social rituals are meaningless and repetitive, but it's worth pointing out that Holden is notably guilty of some of these very same behaviors, since he himself is fixated on girls, liquor, and sex. Salinger thus presents readers with a character who offers genuine insight into the contradictory nature of society, but whose views also seem self-defeating and are largely invalidated because of the carelessness with which he applies them to his own life.

❝ I said no, there wouldn't be marvelous places to go to after I went to college and all. Open your ears. It'd be entirely different. We'd have to go downstairs in elevators with suitcases and stuff. We'd have to phone up everybody and tell 'em good-by and send 'em postcards from hotels and all...It wouldn't be the same at all. You don't see what I mean at all.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Sally

Hayes

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

As Sally tries to tell Holden that they'll both have plenty of time in life to do whatever they want after they finish school, Holden interrupts her to keep rejecting the trappings of adult life. He claims that living together when they are older would be horrifying and not at all equivalent to escaping to the woods right now.

That Holden denies the existence of "marvelous places" in the future speaks to his deep anxieties about adulthood. Evidently, he believes that all experiences after high school and college will be banal and depressing. The things he looks forward to doing right now, he thinks, will be "entirely different." This isn't because they will actually change, but because of how codified and mechanical Holden's life will become when he's an adult. Whereas escaping to the woods as an adolescent holds the potential of complete isolation (and perhaps a perpetuation of the "innocence" of childhood), travel as an adult brings both literal and metaphorical baggage. Holden is perturbed by the "suitcases and stuff" that would weigh him and Sally down, as well as the social networks that demand goodbyes and "postcards." He identifies isolation and ease of travel with youth and sees adults as living artificial, ensnared lives. Though this may be an exaggerated image, Salinger once again grants Holden the benefit of a compelling critical eye. Adults, indeed, are weighed down by these concerns, and so Holden's wish to hold on to his carefree adolescence is understandable even if it is also unreasonable. After all, his adolescence isn't actually all that carefree to begin with.

Chapter 22 Quotes

"You don't like *any*thing that's happening."

It made me even more depressed when she said that.

"Yes I do. Yes I do. *Sure* I do. Don't say that. Why the hell do you say that?"

"Because you don't. You don't like any schools. You don't like a million things. You *don't*."

"I do! That's where you're wrong—that's exactly where you're wrong! Why the hell do you have to say that?" I said. Boy, was she depressing me.

"Because you don't," she said. "Name one thing."

"One thing? One thing I like?" I said. "Okay."

The trouble was, I couldn't concentrate too hot. Sometimes it's hard to concentrate.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Phoebe Caulfield

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

When Holden complains about the other students at Pencey, Phoebe challenges him to name something he likes. She pokes fun at his misanthropic behavior, suggesting that Holden's critical views are equally and unfairly applied to everything.

The brilliance of Phoebe's comment that Holden doesn't like anything is that it points out the indiscriminate quality of his criticisms. If he does indeed find everything so deplorable, then his specific contentions with each school and each thing cannot be taken seriously. This would render Holden a banal cynic, as opposed to a genuine outsider who can articulate compelling views. To defend his position, Holden finds himself ironically affirming that he enjoys some elements of life: yet his repetition of, "Yes I do. Yes I do. *Sure* I do," only serves to repeat empty terms that do nothing to prove Phoebe wrong. And when he is pushed to "name one thing" that he likes, he cannot come up with a single example.

Readers should note that Holden is at least partly sensitive to Phoebe's criticisms. Were they to come from another character, Holden would likely find her points irrelevant or phony, yet here he takes them quite seriously. Salinger stresses, then, Holden's close relationship to his siblings and the way he will accept criticism only from those whose opinion he values. Furthermore, Holden does not want to

be seen as a depressive who finds everything meaningless, implying that he evidently maintains a desire to enjoy certain things about life.

> 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.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Phoebe Caulfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

When Phoebe asks Holden what he would like to be, he returns to the tune he heard earlier—the one about "the catcher in the rye." Holden says he would like to be the catcher in the song, and he goes on to describe an image he has of standing in a large field and making sure that children don't accidentally fall off a ledge. This, it seems, is what he thinks it would mean to be the "catcher."

Holden's answer strikes Phoebe—and likely the reader—as relatively nonsensical. Catching children in the rye is not an actual profession, but perhaps this is why Holden finds it genuine, compared to the occupations that are actually available in real life. Indeed, the way Holden introduces the phrase, "Anyway, I keep picturing," indicates that his profession is not based on logical consideration but rather an idealized image of what he would like life to look like.

In this unrealistic fantasy, Holden wishes to be a savior for younger children. He does not himself wish to remain in a state of childhood, explicitly saying, "nobody big, I mean—except me," thus showing that he *does* value maturation. Instead, he values the idea of being able to assist the "thousands of little kids" in the field, demonstrating that he finds real meaning in acts of altruism. This imagined profession speaks to a genuine sense of goodness within Holden, but it also reveals his own wish to be saved from falling over the metaphorical cliff of adolescent despair. Holden may want to be the catcher in the rye, but he simultaneously wants to be caught by someone—and thus Salinger's title refers to the protagonist as both catcher and caught, both thoughtful adult and astray youth.

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.

Related Characters: Mr. Antolini (speaker), Holden Caulfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

Holden visits his old English teacher, Mr. Antolini, who offers this compelling advice for Holden's future. Mr. Antolini claims that Holden is following a well-trod narrative in which he expects too much from the world and, because of this, will inevitably be disappointed. Mr. Antolini's words are more compelling for Holden than the comments he has received from other adults—for instead of offering stock phrases, Mr. Antolini closely examines Holden's position and gives a specific diagnosis of his problem: "a special kind of fall." Holden's fall, he contends, is notable because it is infinite. Whereas a normal fall, say a specific negative experience, has a painful endpoint and impact of pain, Holden's fall is permanent because it stems from the mental state he applies to every experience. Worse, this fall will affect his entire life.

Mr. Antolini's advice emphasizes the tragic impact that Holden's cynicism and inability to embrace life might have on his overall existence. If Holden doesn't find a way to continue looking for happiness, Antolini implies, he will most likely stop trying to find contentment altogether. By saying this, he suggests that the pursuit of happiness is what Holden should focus on, not necessarily on whether or not it's possible to actually find satisfaction in the world. This frame of mind is helpful to Holden because it acknowledges his belief that society is full of unhappiness, shallowness, and inauthenticity. Instead of fixating on this, though, Mr.

Antolini wants Holden to continue trying to lead a meaningful life, suggesting that giving up is the worst way to respond to the various hardships that are an unavoidable part of being alive.

"Among other things, you'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You're by no means alone on that score…Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them—if you want to.

Related Characters: Mr. Antolini (speaker), Holden Caulfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Antolini continues to offer Holden advice about his "outsider" mindset. He notes that many people have experienced what he feels and that Holden should turn to the writing that has been produced about this subject.

By fitting Holden's life into a common narrative, Mr. Antolini both validates Holden's frustrations and shows that they are not as unique as he might think. He thus negates any claim Holden may have to exceptionalism, for he is "not the first person" to have gone through this story. By placing the terms "confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior" in a single sentence, Mr. Antolini implies that Holden's critical mindset of being "sickened" may, in fact, be the result of the first two qualities; his perceptions are not so much objective interpretations of humanity as they are the results of his own sense of being lost. Adding that "many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually," Mr. Antolini reiterates that even Holden's most abstract worries are nothing novel.

Though this response might seem to deny the meaning of Holden's mindset, Mr. Antolini actually interprets this commonality as a sign of hope. Saying, "some of them kept records of their troubles," he speaks to the wide canon of memoir and fiction that discuss individuals' anxieties about and alienation from society. (Indeed, this is one of the most prevalent motivators and subjects of art.) Since others have been moved to engage with these issues, Holden can "learn from them" and thus find solace and advice about how to confront these anxieties. Salinger offers a subtle wink at the reader, here, for this novel is itself one of those "records." He implies that it may serve a similar source of learning for readers experiencing their own moral and social troubles—and indeed, *The Catcher in the Rye* has become a classic precisely because of this.

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.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Phoebe Caulfield

Related Themes:

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

When Holden goes to Phoebe's school, he sees this note written on the wall. He becomes furious in response and tries desperately to remove the profane language.

Though the reader should be skeptical of Holden's repeated use of the word "crazy" by now, it is evident that the words move him into a state of intense anger. His anger comes, as usual, from an envisioned scene: the kids reading the words and then learning their significance. For Holden, this moment stands for their corruption and their permanent departure from childhood into adolescence. Holden himself often swears, demonstrating that he has no direct issue with this language as such. Rather, he hates the effect it would have on the kids, reinforcing the way Holden wants to play a protective "catcher" role for younger children.

"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... I think, even, if I ever die, and they stick me in a cemetery, and I have tombstone and all, it'll say "Holden Caulfield" on it, and then what year I was born and what year I died, and then right under that it'll say "Fuck you." I'm positive, in fact.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Phoebe Caulfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 264

Explanation and Analysis

After seeing a second inscription that reads, "Fuck You," Holden despairs about the lack of security and innocence in the world. He morbidly remarks that his own tombstone will most likely be marked by a similar statement.

Holden's yearning for "a place that's nice and peaceful" speaks to his childhood nostalgia and his wish to be caught—and thus saved or protected—by a metaphorical "catcher in the rye." In addition, that he is distraught by the way this graffiti violates sacred spaces for Phoebe and the other children once again suggests that he wants to protect not only himself from the corruptive influence of adulthood, but also other children. In this regard, then, he wants to be the "catcher in the rye" even as he also wants the same kind of protection that he would offer to other children in this capacity. Even if he tries to preserve youthful innocence in the world, though, he suspects that this is a futile endeavor, as evidenced by his belief that somebody will probably write curses on his gravestone.

> All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, and so was old Phoebe, and I was sort of afraid she'd fall off the goddam horse, but I didn't say anything or do anything. 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.

Related Characters: Holden Caulfield (speaker), Phoebe Caulfield

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

Holden watches Phoebe on the carousel and reflects upon the way she and many others will make mistakes. He believes that intervention must have a limit and that children should be allowed to make errors and suffer the consequences.

This point of view marks a striking inversion of Holden's character. Before, he praised the role of "the catcher in the rye," a figure who prevents children from harm. Now, though, he decides to let Phoebe risk the possibility of falling off her horse on the carousel, understanding that being overly protective actually does children a disservice because they should be granted the opportunity to make their own mistakes. This, it seems, is the only way they will learn to navigate the world. In this regard, Holden's wild journey through New York City has been nothing but one big mistake, one he can possibly learn from, though it remains unclear at the end of the novel whether or not he actually will change his behavior based on what has happened to him.

Regardless of whether or not Holden changes in the aftermath of his expulsion from Pencey, though, it's clear that he has adopted an oddly mature perspective of children. The line, "The thing with kids is," marks him as a wizened adult offering advice, whereas in just the previous chapter he has played the role of a youngster receiving advice from Mr. Antolini. In turn, Salinger stresses the way Holden's identity continues to shift based on his social context—becoming at times the wise adult, at others the naive, rebellious teenager. And as with the image of "the catcher in the rye," his comment invariably reflects back on what Holden himself requires: at the novel's end, perhaps, he no longer wants just to be caught by others, but rather seems to have recognized that the process of falling itself has merit. Thus the poetic moment of the carousel expresses his maturation both in the way he looks from a distance at the state of childhood, and in the way that he himself no longer craves being saved by somebody else.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

It is several months into 1950, and 16-year-old Holden Caulfield is recuperating at an unspecified location after becoming "run-down." His story begins, he says, around Christmas of last year, though he doesn't want to go into too much detail about his life. Instead of explaining the specifics of his childhood, he has decided to only describe some of the "madman stuff" that has happened to him in the past year. After all, this limited amount of information is all he told his own brother, D.B., who visits him every week. Holden notes that D.B. is a talented writer who has recently started working on movies in Hollywood, a career decision Holden looks down upon, thinking that D.B. is now nothing but a "prostitute" in the movie industry, which Holden hates because he can't stand movies in general.

Although Holden has just begun telling his story, he doesn't want to give up too much information about his background. This suggests that, although he wants to share what has happened to him in the past year, he doesn't actually want to reveal very much about himself. In this regard, he remains guarded even as he tries to express himself, ultimately indicating that he doesn't want to examine certain parts of his own life, which are perhaps troubling to him. On another note, his feelings about D.B.'s involvement in the film industry hint at his cynical outlook, as does his general dislike of movies.

Holden's story begins at Pencey Prep, an exclusive private school for boys in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. It is the day of Pencey's long awaited football game against its rival, Saxon Hall, but Holden has decided not to attend. Even the headmaster of Pencey, Dr. Thurmer, is at the game, but this means nothing to Holden because he thinks Thurmer is "a phony slob." As the game begins, Holden stands atop a hill and looks down at the commotion, thinking about the fact that he's hardly missing anything worthwhile, since there are rarely many girls at the football games.

From the very beginning of Holden's story, it becomes clear that he feels distanced from his peers. While everyone at Pencey is at the school's big football game, he stands atop a nearby hill, a situation that emphasizes that he exists at a remove from the people in his life. This is a self-enforced brand of isolation, since Holden doesn't want to be at the game, which he associates with "phony slob[s]" like Dr. Thurmer. In this moment, then, his hyper-critical outlook comes to the forefront of the novel. The only thing that might convince him to join his peers, it seems, would be if there were girls in attendance, suggesting that the possibility of having a romantic encounter is perhaps one of the only things that might motivate him to overcome his distaste for "phony" camaraderie.

Holden never planned on attending the annual football game in the first place, since he's supposed to be in New York City with the fencing team. He doesn't fence, but he is—or *was*—the manager of the team, but he accidentally left all the equipment on the subway, forcing the team to forfeit the match. As a result, the entire team refused to speak to him the entire ride back to Pencey, though Holden says that the entire situation was almost humorous to him.

Holden's isolation from his peers once more becomes apparent. This time, his failure to fulfill the fencing team's expectations alienates him from the athletes. That he doesn't seem to care about this is worth noting, since it suggests that he's used to disappointing the people in his life and letting this estrange him from them.

While it's true that Holden doesn't care about the football game against Saxon Hall, he has also decided not to attend because he has plans to visit Mr. Spencer, his history teacher. Mr. Spencer is elderly and has come down with a nasty cold, and he wrote Holden a letter asking him to visit before he goes home. At this point, Holden reveals that he has been expelled from Pencey because he's failing four out of his five classes. The school has given him multiple warnings, but he still hasn't put in the effort to improve his grades, even after his parents recently visited to have a frank discussion with Dr. Thurmer.

Holden's failure to improve his grades is consistent with his overall lack of concern regarding what other people think. In the same way that he doesn't care about disappointing his peers on the fencing team, he also doesn't care about disappointing his parents, Mr. Spencer, or Dr. Thurmer. This, in turn, suggests that he is uninterested in doing things for other people, clearly finding it pointless to put effort into doing something about which he doesn't care.

As Holden stands on the hill, he tries to feel a sense of closure. He claims to have no problem with leaving Pencey, but he doesn't like departing from a place without saying a proper goodbye. After thinking for a moment, he remembers an evening in the fall when he and two friends passed a football back and forth until it was too dark to see. This memory suddenly makes him feel as if he has grasped the fact that he's leaving, and he senses that he has managed to bid Pencey farewell. Glad to have gained this closure, Holden runs down the hill toward Mr. Spencer's house.

Holden's desire to bid Pencey a proper farewell suggests that he yearns for closure in his life. Although he doesn't care about getting kicked out of Pencey, he apparently has a certain emotional attachment to the place, at least insofar as he wants to have a way to remember it once he's gone. In this moment, then, readers see that Holden is more sentimental than he wants to admit.

CHAPTER 2

Once inside Mr. Spencer's house, Holden feels depressed. He doesn't like the way the house smells or looks, and he can't stop thinking about how old Mr. Spencer is. As he approaches the bedroom in which his teacher is resting, he thinks about the fact that Mr. Spencer can't even pick up a piece of chalk when he drops it during class. Holden thinks this is unspeakably depressing—a feeling that only intensifies when he enters Mr. Spencer's bedroom and is overwhelmed by the smell of Vicks Nose Drops and the sight of Spencer's old, bumpy chest in his tattered bathrobe.

Holden's thoughts about Mr. Spencer reveal how uncomfortable he is with the idea of aging. When he thinks about Mr. Spencer struggling to pick up a piece of chalk, he finds himself feeling quite sad—a feeling that only intensifies when he sees his teacher's wrinkled skin. Simply put, Mr. Spencer serves as concrete evidence that it's impossible to avoid growing up. Because Holden's future is so unsure (as a result of his expulsion), he finds the unavoidable process of getting older quite troubling and depressing, since it further emphasizes how little control he has over his life's trajectory.

Mr. Spencer greets Holden warmly and claims to be feeling great despite his appearance. Before long, he brings up Holden's imminent departure from Pencey and asks what Dr. Thurmer said to him, adding that he heard the headmaster had a frank talk with him. Holden explains that Thurmer told him life is a game and that a person must play by the rules. Mr. Spencer agrees with this sentiment, and Holden assures him that he believes this, too, though he privately concedes that life is really only a game for people on the winning side, thinking that this entire theory is ridiculous.

Dr. Thurmer's assertion that life is a game is a perfect example of the kind of "phony" mindset that Holden hates. Unable to get himself to care about living up to expectations, Holden rejects the general conceit that life is a game, since this theory frames existence as little more than a rat race. Since Holden doesn't see the point of applying himself in endeavors like academics, he has trouble accepting that a person should go through life thinking of existence so narrow-mindedly, though it's worth mentioning that he himself doesn't seem to have thought of an alternative approach.

Mr. Spencer asks Holden if his parents know about his expulsion yet, and Holden explains that Dr. Thurmer is going to send them a letter on Monday. When Spencer asks how his parents will take the news, the young man admits that they'll be quite upset, since this is the fourth school he's been kicked out of. "Boy!" he exclaims, trying to show Spencer how much he cares about the situation. He then internally reflects upon his use of the word "Boy!" thinking that it's a rather childish thing to say. Nonetheless, Holden notes that he says "Boy!" quite a lot, admitting that he's often rather immature, though he has grey hairs on one side of his head. He also says that many people call him immature, and though he agrees that this is true, he's quick to point out that it isn't *completely* true.

That Pencey is the fourth school Holden has been kicked out of suggests that his lack of motivation is part of a larger pattern in his life. It also suggests that his expulsion from Pencey most likely won't encourage him to apply himself in the future, since he has already gone through this process before and apparently gotten nothing out of it. When he pretends to be upset about the situation, it becomes obvious that he's well-versed in tricking adults into thinking he's remorseful. This behavior demonstrates that although Holden decries other people for being "phony," this attitude is hypocritical, since he himself is not above using phoniness to get what he wants. Ironically enough, he pretends to be mature by recognizing *his immaturity, giving people like Mr. Spencer the impression that he has learned something valuable when, in reality, he has no intentions of changing his ways.*

Mr. Spencer comments that he once met Holden's parents, whom he thinks are "grand" people. This statement irritates Holden, who can't stand the word "grand" because he thinks it's very "phony." As he thinks this, Mr. Spencer goes on at length about how Holden needs to apply himself, reminding him that he failed History because he knew absolutely nothing about what Spencer spent the entire semester teaching. He then instructs Holden to fetch the essay he wrote about the Ancient Egyptians, which is sitting on his dresser. When Holden complies, Spencer makes him listen as he reads the essay aloud, embarrassing him as he repeats what Holden himself already knows he wrote. He even reads the postscript that Holden included in the essay, which notes that Holden will understand if Spencer fails him.

By making Holden listen to his own inadequate essay, Mr. Spencer hopes to shame the young man into wanting to apply himself in the future. He also tries to make Holden see that he will continue to regret his actions if he keeps coasting through life—after all, it's embarrassing for Holden to listen to his pathetic essay. Unfortunately, though, Holden is more focused on whether or not Spencer is a "phony" than on learning from his own mistakes.

After reading Holden's essay aloud, Mr. Spencer asks if Holden blames him for flunking him. Holden assures him that he doesn't, but he can see that Mr. Spencer feels bad about having failed him. For this reason, Holden goes on at length about how he would have done the same thing in Spencer's position and how it must be difficult to be a teacher. Although he says these things, though, he knows he's only "shooting the bull" to make Spencer feel better. In fact, he's so good at being dishonest in this way that he doesn't even have to focus on what he's saying, so he thinks about **the ducks** that congregate in a lagoon in Central Park, wondering where they go during the winter.

Holden is acutely aware of whether or not people are being authentic, which is why it's rather strange that he allows himself to "shoot the bull." This again suggests that he isn't all that self-aware, since he doesn't hold himself to the same rigorous standards to which he holds everyone else. The fact that he thinks about the ducks in the Central Park lagoon is also noteworthy, since it hints at his resistance to change—as he considers where they go during the winter, he grapples with the idea that living beings must constantly adapt to the world, something he himself has trouble doing.

As Holden goes on at length, Mr. Spencer cuts him off and asks how he feels about failing out of Pencey. He also points out that Holden left Elkton Hills and Whooton, and he asks why this is the case. Thinking Spencer wouldn't understand, Holden tells him only that it's a long story, though he privately tells the reader that he wanted out of Elkton Hills because he was "surrounded by phonies," especially the headmaster, who only gave his time to the wealthier, better-looking parents.

That Holden left Elkton Hills voluntarily is significant, since it underscores just how much he dislikes being "surrounded by phonies." Of course, readers have just seen that Holden is often rather phony himself, but this doesn't bother him because he's primarily concerned with whether or not other *people are authentic or honest about who they are. For this reason, he can't stand the idea of somebody like his former headmaster paying more attention to wealthy parents than anyone else.*

When Mr. Spencer encourages Holden to plan for the future, Holden decides he has had enough. Although he recognizes that Spencer genuinely wants to help him, he thinks they'll never be able to understand each other because of their many differences. To that end, he thinks that he and Spencer are on opposing sides of a spectrum, creating a gap he thinks is impossible to bridge. With this in mind, he lies and says he has to collect his things from the gym so that he can pack them. On his way out, he hears Mr. Spencer call after him, and though he isn't certain what the old man says, he thinks he can make out the words, "Good luck." This is an expression that Holden hates, and it makes him depressed to think that this is the last thing Spencer chooses to say to him.

Holden's belief that Mr. Spencer will never be able to understand how he feels is quite naïve. Although Holden feels like he's the only person experiencing feelings of disillusionment with the world, what he fails to recognize is that most people go through a phase (often in their teenage years) of questioning the "phoniness" of their surroundings. Rather than understanding that Mr. Spencer has most likely had similar thoughts at some point in his life, though, Holden sees him as utterly unrelatable. This is because he thinks of Spencer and himself as occupying two sides of a spectrum, forever removed from one another because of their age difference. In turn, Holden's strange conception of what it means to grow up brings itself to the forefront of the novel once again, and he finds himself unable to appreciate Spencer's well wishes, clearly thinking that the phrase "Good luck" is depressing because it implies that he will have to overcome challenges in his future.

CHAPTER 3

Holden returns to his dorm, thinking as he goes about how good he is at lying. Although he told Mr. Spencer that he needed to collect his things from the gym, he doesn't actually keep anything there—he simply wanted to get away from the old man. As he enters the dorm building, he thinks about the fact that it's named after a Pencey alumnus who got rich from owning funeral homes. He remembers this man visiting Pencey one time to see the first football game of the year, recalling that he drove up in a fancy Cadillac and then told the students that they should never be too sheepish to pray. All the while, Holden couldn't stop thinking that he was nothing but a "phony bastard."

Again, Holden exhibits his dislike of people he thinks are inauthentic. Ironically enough, though, he thinks scornfully about this Pencey alumnus right after smugly considering how good he himself is at lying. In turn, it becomes clear once more that he doesn't subject himself to his own judgment, though it's also possible that Holden sees a distinction between lying and living a certain lifestyle. Although he often lies to get out of things he doesn't want to do, people like this Pencey alumnus lead entire lives based on hypocrisy. What really seems to bother Holden is that this man got rich off of death—a sign that Holden dislikes anyone who tries to capitalize on other people's misfortune.

Alone in his room, Holden reads while wearing his new **red hunting cap**, which he bought while in New York City with the fencing team. He thinks about how much he likes reading books, but Robert Ackley, his neighbor, barges in and interrupts him. Holden finds Ackley annoying and repulsive, since he's tactless and has bad hygiene. Worse, Ackley acts as if a person should feel lucky to spend time with him even though everyone dislikes him. As Holden tries to read, Ackley paces around his room and picks up various objects before putting them down again in the wrong spot. He takes special pleasure in doing this to the things that belong to Holden's roommate, Ward Stradlater, whom Ackley hates. Even Holden thinks that Stradlater is conceited, but he doesn't mind him for the most part.

It's interesting that Holden likes reading so much, considering that he's getting kicked out of school for failing his classes. This suggests that his academic problems have more to do with his unwillingness to exert himself than with his actual intelligence. On another note, the fact that he lets Ackley pace around his room even though he finds him annoying indicates that he isn't quite as intolerant of other people as he might otherwise seem.

Ackley asks Holden about the fencing match in New York, and Holden is forced to tell him that he left the team's equipment on the subway. Although Holden tries to make it clear that he doesn't want to talk, Ackley continues to ask him questions about his mistake. Finally, Holden tells him to stop talking about it, saying, "How 'bout sitting *down* or something, Ackley kid?" He says this because he knows that Ackley hates being called "Ackley kid," especially since he's 18 and Holden is only 16. Still, this doesn't stop Ackley from bugging him until Stradlater finally returns from the football game, at which point Ackley returns to his own room.

Holden doesn't necessarily like having Ackley pace around his room, but he doesn't truly take issue with his presence until Ackley starts asking him about the fencing match. This is because Holden doesn't like being forced to examine his own flaws. When Ackley asks him about leaving the fencing gear on the subway, then, he suddenly becomes combative, purposefully addressing Ackley in a way he knows will bother him. In turn, readers see that Holden tends to lash out as a way of avoiding certain thoughts or feelings.

When Stradlater enters the room, he explains that he and his date decided to leave the football game early. He then asks Holden if he can borrow his houndstooth jacket, but Holden hesitates to answer, instead wondering where Stradlater's date is. Unlike Ackley, Holden is rather fond of Stradlater, despite the fact that he's an overly confident person who clearly likes himself a little too much. One of the reasons Holden is able to see past this is because Stradlater is also quite kind—the type of person who would give a classmate his tie if the classmate said he liked it. As Stradlater takes off his shirt and heads to the bathroom to shave his face, he explains that his date is waiting for him downstairs.

At the beginning of the novel, Holden acts like he doesn't have any kind of attachment to Pencey. Standing alone on a hill instead of attending the big football game, he presents himself as someone who has isolated himself from his surroundings—a lone wolf with no emotional connection to his environment. Now, though, readers see that he actually does *have a certain fondness for the people around him, as made evident by his appreciation of Stradlater and his willingness to overlook the young man's flaws.*

CHAPTER 4

Having nothing better to do, Holden keeps Stradlater company as he shaves. Holden notes that Stradlater is a "secret" slob, who is handsome but has personal habits that are nearly as dirty as Ackley's, though nobody would ever know this unless they roomed with him. As he shaves, he asks Holden to do him a favor by completing his English homework for him. Because he thinks it's good for people like Stradlater to experience a bit of suspense in their lives, though, Holden doesn't answer right away, instead asking whom Stradlater is dating. When Stradlater doesn't immediately tell him, Holden jumps up and puts him in a half-nelson, taking him by surprise and momentarily infuriating him. With ease, Stradlater escapes Holden's grip and tells him to "cut out the crap."

Although Holden likes Stradlater, he still recognizes the many ways in which his roommate is a "phony." For instance, he notices that Stradlater presents himself as clean and handsome even though he's actually quite messy. That Holden even takes note of this is worth considering, since it's such a trivial thing to seize upon. After all, the discrepancy between Stradlater's public image and his personal hygiene is rather unremarkable, since most people have aspects of their personality that they choose not to show the world. To Holden, though, this is a sign of inauthenticity.

Once again, Holden asks the name of Stradlater's date, and Stradlater suddenly remembers that the girl he's about to take out mentioned that she knows Holden. Her name, Stradlater says, is Jean Gallagher. "*Jane* Gallagher," Holden says, correcting him. This news thoroughly surprises Holden, since he really *does* know Jane—in fact, he knows her on a somewhat intimate level, since they spent the majority of the summer hanging out together two years ago. This was when their families summered next door to each other in Maine, and Holden fondly remembers aloud that Jane and he used to play checkers, and he recalls that Jane's family owned a large pinscher, though Stradlater interrupts him as he tells this story, clearly uninterested.

Although Holden doesn't usually seem to care about much, he suddenly focuses on his conversation with Stradlater when he discovers that Stradlater is about to go on a date with Jane, a girl from his past. This suggests that Holden is very intrigued by the prospect of establishing a romantic connection with a woman. At the same time, though, what he remembers about Jane is quite innocent and nostalgic. In contrast, Stradlater is on a date with Jane, providing a stark and mature contrast to Holden's childish memories.


As Stradlater shaves, Holden speaks at length about Jane, remembering that she's a dancer and that she used to keep all of her kings in the back row when they used to play checkers together. Holden then says that he should go downstairs to say hello to her, but he doesn't actually make any moves to do so, instead repeating this sentiment periodically as he talks about her. He also recalls that Jane's parents got divorced and that her stepfather is an alcoholic who walks around the house naked. This captures Stradlater's attention, since he's interested in anything that has to do with sex. However, when Holden continues by saying that Jane had a rough childhood, Stradlater tunes out once again.

In this exchange, Holden continues to reminisce about Jane in a rather innocent manner. It's obvious that he's interested in her, since he's so fixated on the memory of the time they spent together. And though this interest is likely romantic, it's also void of any sexual desire. Stradlater, on the other hand, is only interested in thinking about Jane in a sexual manner. This contrast emphasizes Holden's unconscious hesitancy to fully enter the adult world, instead investing himself in memories that he thinks of as pure. As he thinks this way, he considers going downstairs to greet Jane, but can't quite bring himself to do so. This unwillingness to act on his feelings is a trait that will follow him throughout the novel.


Once more, Holden says he should go downstairs to say hello to Jane, and Stradlater asks him why he keeps saying that but not doing anything. "I'm not in the mood right now," Holden says. He then asks Stradlater not to tell Jane that he's getting kicked out of Pencey.

Even though Holden clearly feels fondly about Jane, he can't bring himself to actually confront her. This is because he has idealized her in his mind. As a result, actually meeting her would threaten to destroy the perfect version of her that he has built for himself. In this moment, then, it becomes clear that Holden tends to romanticize certain ideas and is unwilling to subject himself to harsh realities.

Holden asks what Stradlater and Jane are going to do, and Stradlater says they might go to New York City if they have time, though he doubts they'll be able to because Jane only signed out of her dorm until 9:30. The fact that Stradlater says this last part with a touch of annoyance bothers Holden, who senses that Stradlater wants to have sex with Jane. For this reason, he makes fun of Stradlater by sarcastically suggesting that Jane would have signed out for later if only she'd known how charming he was. "Goddam right," Stradlater says before putting on Holden's houndstooth jacket, reminding him to do his English homework, and leaving. When he's gone, Ackley barges in once more. This time, though, Holden is happy to see him, since he feels quite nervous after his conversation with Stradlater.

Holden is nervous because he doesn't want Stradlater and Jane to have sex. After all, Holden has romantic feelings for Jane, so he doesn't want his roommate to engage in any romantic activity with her. At the same time, though, Holden's feelings for Jane aren't strictly romantic—they also have to do with the way he idealizes childhood. Looking back, he remembers the time he spent with Jane as happy and untroubled, a part of his past for which he feels quite nostalgic. The idea of Stradlater having sex with Jane, then, is especially troubling because it shatters his ability to think about Jane in an innocent way and thus disrupts his idealized childhood memories.

CHAPTER 5

After dinner, Holden convinces his friend Mal Brossard to let Ackley come see a movie with them. Although nobody ever invites him anywhere, Ackley pretends to hesitate when Holden invites him. Before he agrees to come, he asks who else will be going, and when Holden tells him that Mal will be there, Ackley acts disappointed before finally accepting. When the trio eventually realizes that Mal and Ackley have both already seen the movie, they eat hamburgers and play pinball instead. Afterward, Ackley follows Holden back to his room and tells him a story about having sex with a girl, which Holden knows is a lie.

It's surprising that Holden is willing to spend time with Ackley, considering how "phony" Ackley behaves by trying to act like he doesn't want to go to the movies. In turn, it becomes clear that Holden is lonely and simply wants to find people with whom he can pass the time, perhaps hoping to take his mind off Stradlater and Jane. To that end, the evening he ends up spending with Ackley and Mal is very innocent and childish in comparison to what might be happening between Stradlater and Jane—something that no doubt unsettles Holden.

Finally, Holden tells Ackley to leave so he can work on Stradlater's English homework. The assignment is to write a descriptive short essay about a house or some other significant place. As long as it's descriptive, Stradlater has instructed him, the composition can be about nearly anything. Taking this to heart, Holden decides to write about his brother Allie's baseball mitt, which Allie covered with poems that he wrote with a green pen. Holden was 13 when Allie died of leukemia at age 11. He describes Allie as kind, innocent, and the smartest person in his family.

With the revelation of Allie's death, suddenly Holden's teenage insecurity, angst, and disillusionment don't seem quite so typical. Indeed, the death of his younger brother explains why he sees life's supposed "rules" as arbitrary and cruel, which is most likely why he found it so hard to agree with Dr. Thurmer and Mr. Spencer that life is like a game in which a person must follow the rules. In addition, Allie's death clarifies why Holden seems to have fixated on childhood, seeing it as a state of purity and innocence. In the same way that he thinks of his deceased brother as the perfect person, he idealizes his memory of Jane from two years ago.

As Holden recalls the night of Allie's death, he remembers that he responded to the news by sleeping in the garage and breaking all the windows with his bare hands. Because of this, his parents wanted to have him psychoanalyzed, and Holden doesn't blame them, recognizing that punching out the windows was a stupid thing for him to have done. He now has trouble making a fist with his right hand, which sometimes still hurts. But Holden leaves these details out of Stradlater's homework assignment, instead focusing on simply describing Allie's baseball mitt. To make sure he does a good job, he takes the mitt itself out of his bag, and though he feels strange about using it for Stradlater's homework, he can't deny that it feels good to write about the mitt.

It's understandable that Holden would be devastated by his brother's death, but his reaction to the news is notably violent and self-destructive, indicating that he has trouble processing his emotions. Unfortunately, it seems as if his parents never actually took him to a psychoanalyst, who might have been able to help him deal with his feelings. As a result, he has no emotional outlet, which is why he takes pleasure in writing about Allie's mitt for Stradlater's homework assignment, finally finding an arena in which he can express the way he feels.

CHAPTER 6

Holden spends the next several hours fretting about what's happening between Stradlater and Jane on their date. This is largely because he knows Stradlater is so sexually advanced, having gone on multiple double dates with him and witnessed his determination to have sex. When he finally comes back to the dorm, though, Stradlater focuses not on what happened between him and Jane, but on the composition Holden wrote about Allie's baseball mitt. Realizing that Holden didn't write about a house, room, or place, he angrily tells him that it's no wonder he's getting expelled, since he doesn't do anything "the way you're supposed to." Hearing this, Holden snatches back the assignment and rips it to shreds, at which point he starts smoking a cigarette just to annoy Stradlater, who dislikes it when Holden smokes inside.

What's perhaps most tragic about this interaction is that Holden genuinely tried to do Stradlater a favor by writing his English composition. In fact, Stradlater emphasized that the piece simply needed to be descriptive, so it's unfair of him to get mad at Holden for writing a vivid description of Allie's mitt. Of course, what makes this situation even worse is that Holden has tried to express something in his writing that he rarely gets a chance to talk about. When Stradlater gets angry at him, then, he becomes overly defensive and acts out. Once again, then, Holden responds harshly to confrontation, this time struggling not only with yet another person trying to tell him to follow the rules, but with the idea that Stradlater has threatened his innocent and nostalgic memories of Jane and Allie

Puffing away on his cigarette, Holden asks Stradlater what happened on his date with Jane, but Stradlater refuses to say. Nonetheless, Holden continues to pressure him into giving him details about the night, learning that they didn't go to New York because Jane had to be back by 9:30. This makes Holden even more curious, since he wants to know what they did all night if they didn't go to the city. Finally, Stradlater explains that they sat in a car that he borrowed from one of Pencey's basketball coaches. This annoys Holden, who notes that athletes always "stick together," though he acknowledges that he, too, has gone on a double date with Stradlater in this very same car.

If Holden truly wanted to preserve his innocent image of Jane, he would stop asking Stradlater what happened on their date. Nonetheless, he continues to badger his roommate, thereby subjecting himself to the possibility that they may have had sex. In this way, he simultaneously tries to protect his idealized memory of Jane while also acknowledging that she's older now and capable of doing things that would ruin his childish conception of her. As a result, Holden teeters between naïveté and the adult world, stuck between immaturity and maturity.

Unable to resist, Holden asks Stradlater if he and Jane had sex. This offends Stradlater, who refuses to answer. Consequently, Holden tries to punch him, but Stradlater wrestles him to the ground and puts his knees on his chest. Pinned, Holden continues to insult Stradlater, accusing him of thinking he can have sex with anyone he wants. When he calls him a moron, Stradlater warns him to be quiet, but he only repeats the insult until Stradlater punches him in the nose. Just before leaving the room, he tells Holden to wash his face, clearly worried that he seriously injured him, though Holden simply calls him a moron once again.

Holden hates the idea that anything sexual might have happened between Stradlater and Jane, but he can't stop himself from thinking about this possibility. Consequently, he subjects himself to an idea that greatly upsets him, and when Stradlater refuses to answer him, he finds himself unable to take the suspense, which is why he attacks him. Once more, then, he lashes out because of his own inability to process his emotions. Furthermore, his refusal to stop calling Stradlater a moron underlines his petulant, childish nature while also spotlighting his stubbornness—Holden, it seems, is somebody who will continue to do what he wants even when it's in his best interest to stop.

After Stradlater leaves, Holden puts on his **red hunting hat** and looks at his face in the mirror, thinking that the blood on his face makes him look tough, though he thinks of himself as a "pacifist." He then decides to go into Ackley's room because he's certain that the commotion must have woken him up, and he doesn't feel like being alone.

Holden uses his new hunting hat as a way of setting himself apart from his surroundings, since it's such a unique hat that most people wouldn't wear on an everyday basis. It makes sense, then, that he would put it on in the aftermath of his fight with Stradlater, since he wants to reassure himself that he's nothing like his roommate, whom he suddenly sees as a heartless womanizer. And yet, despite his desire to set himself apart, he also doesn't want to be alone, which is why he seeks out Ackley. This suggests that he doesn't fully *want to alienate himself from his surroundings, only from the aspects that he deems as a threat to his own innocence and authenticity.*

CHAPTER 7

When Holden enters Ackley's room, he blinds him by turning on the light. Annoyed but too intrigued to stop himself, Ackley asks what happened between him and Stradlater, but Holden evades the question. Rather than answering, he plops down on the bed on the other side of the room, which belongs to Ackley's roommate who's out of town for the weekend. He then asks if he can sleep in the room, but Ackley refuses, worrying that his roommate will return—an idea Holden finds ridiculous, since it's Saturday night and Ackley's roommate is gone every weekend until Sunday evening. Finally, he gets annoyed at Ackley and leaves.

Holden goes into Ackley's room because he doesn't want to be alone, but he soon gets fed up with his neighbor and leaves. This is a perfect representation of his approach to interpersonal relationships: one moment, he thinks that being with somebody will make him feel happier; the next moment, he can't stand the person he's with and decides he'd rather go off on his own. This grass-is-greener mentality indicates that he's always looking for ways to improve his mood, ultimately trying to use people to forget about things he'd rather not think about. In the end, though, he finds this approach ineffective when it comes to dealing with his emotions, though he clearly blames this on others instead of examining his own internal world.

Lonely and tormented by the suspicion that Stradlater may have had sex with Jane, Holden decides to leave Pencey and go to New York City until his parents learn he's been expelled. He figures that his parents will receive Dr. Thurmer's letter about his expulsion on Tuesday or Wednesday. Since he doesn't want to be around when they first hear the news, he decides to stay away until then. Quietly, he retreats to his room and packs while Stradlater sleeps. He then gathers his things and counts his money before going to a friend's room and convincing him to buy his typewriter for $20. Just before he leaves, he realizes that he's crying, but he simply puts on his hunting hat, walks down the hall, turns around, and yells, "*Sleep tight, ya morons!*"

Holden's decision to strike out on his own is yet another example of how he behaves rashly when he's forced to confront his emotions. He makes the bold decision to leave for New York City because his fight with Stradlater has left him feeling especially estranged from others at Pencey. Of course, he's only 16, but he sees no problem with his plan of living on his own for a few days. In this way, he postures as an adult even as he continues to idealize the idea of childhood innocence by fixating on whether or not Jane and Stradlater had sex. In turn, readers see that he's a mess of contradictions, in addition to the fact that he's more emotional about this departure than he's willing to admit (as evidenced by his tears). However, none of this stops him from doing what he wants. Before he leaves, he calls his classmates "morons," once again setting himself in opposition to his peers despite also yearning, on some level, to fit in with them.

CHAPTER 8

On the train to New York, a woman sits next to Holden. She notices his Pencey bag and says that her son is a boy named Ernest Morrow, a student in Holden's class. Holden hates Ernest, but lies and says that the boy is extremely popular and would be class president if it weren't for the fact that he's too humble to accept his peers' nomination. This flatters Ernest's mother and entertains Holden, who actually thinks Ernest is one of the "biggest bastards" at Pencey. At the same time, though, he begins to feel bad about lying to Ernest's mother, who he can tell is quite kind.

Once again, Holden contradicts his hatred of "phonies" by lying to Ernest's mother. Although he has no good reason to lie, he gets a kick out of saying that Ernest is a well-respected boy at Pencey. What's most interesting about this moment isn't that Holden lies (which happens frequently), but that he does so in order to please his fellow passenger. Accordingly, this suggests that Holden is eager to make others happy, though he doesn't seem to know how to put this into practice without lying. In this sense, he is socially estranged from other people, finding it easier to lie than to genuinely relate to them or outwardly show any vulnerability.

Flirting with Ernest's mother, Holden invites her to have a drink with him in the train's bar, explaining that he's able to order drinks because of his grey hairs. This entertains Ernest's mother, who politely declines Holden's offer. She then asks why he's coming home so early, and he lies again, this time saying he has a small brain tumor that his doctor needs to remove. This elicits a huge reaction from Ernest's mother, who is so sympathetic that Holden instantly feels guilty for misleading her. When she gets off the train in Newark, she urges him to visit Ernest that summer in Massachusetts, but Holden tells her that he'll be in South America with his grandmother—another lie.

By this point, it begins to seem that Holden is something of a compulsive liar. He hates phoniness in others, but can't avoid it in himself, lying to people because it makes him feel in control of the conversation. However, this tactic tends to backfire, leaving him feeling guilty for deceiving someone as kind as Ernest's mother, who genuinely wishes the best for him. As a result, his dishonesty only further isolates him from others, making it harder for him to establish genuine connections. In fact, the only true effort he makes to relate to Ernest's mother happens when he invites her for a drink—an inappropriate offer that she obviously can't accept, since he's underage and is her son's classmate.

CHAPTER 9

In Penn Station in New York, Holden wants to talk to someone, and considers calling D.B., Phoebe (his younger sister), Jane, or another friend named Sally Hayes. He even considers calling a guy named Carl Luce, one of his classmates at the Whooton School, but he remembers that he doesn't even like him very much. Because of this, decides not to call anyone. Exiting Penn Station, he hails a taxi and gets in, though he accidentally gives the driver his parents' address, so he has to tell him to turn around, directing him to a place called 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. Undeterred, Holden invites the driver to have a cocktail with him when they reach the Edmont, but he declines the invitation.

As Holden makes his way through New York City as an inexperienced teenager, he yearns for company. Striking out on his own seemed like a great idea just a few hours ago, but now he feels quite lonely. This is because he formulated this plan as a direct response to his fight with Stradlater, meaning that he made this big decision in a moment of frustration, focusing solely on running away from his emotions—an impossible endeavor. As soon as he arrives in the city, then, what seemed at first like independence begins to turn into nothing but loneliness.

Before Holden checks in to a room in the Edmont, he takes off his **hunting hat** because he doesn't want anyone to think he's crazy, though he notes that this is a ridiculous notion, since the hotel is full of perverts. In fact, this entire area of the city seems to be teeming with people Holden thinks are perverted. When he gets to his room, he looks out the window and sees people in other rooms—in one particularly odd scene, he witnesses a couple spitting drinks into each other's faces. And though he doesn't want to, Holden finds himself getting slightly aroused by this, thinking that he's a "sex maniac" despite the fact that he doesn't actually understand sex at all.

Although Holden is nostalgic about his youth and childhood, he often tries to conceive of himself as an adult. In keeping with this, he thinks of himself as a "sex maniac" even as he recognizes that he doesn't truly understand the complexities of sex. Furthermore, he judges the people he sees in the window even though he finds what they're doing arousing—a sign that he's quick to judge other people but hesitant (or even unwilling) to subject himself to the same standards to which he holds them. He refuses to acknowledge that he may be just as flawed as the people he writes off as "phony" or "perverted."

Once again, Holden thinks about calling Jane, but he finds the idea exhausting because he would have to pretend to be her uncle or something of that nature in order to convince someone at Jane's dorm to give her the phone so late at night. Because he's not in the right "mood" to do this, then, he decides to call Faith Cavendish, a woman whose number he got from a guy who told him that she is promiscuous. Making his voice deeper, he explains how he got her number, but she refuses to meet him that night. She does, however, suggest that they should get a drink the following day, but Holden doesn't want to wait that long, so he tells her he'll be leaving town. Already regretting this lie, he says goodbye and hangs up the phone.

Again, Holden longs for human company. This time, though, he hopes to satisfy his sexual desires, most likely because what he's seen in the windows across the way has aroused him. However, he can't call Jane to address these feelings because doing so would ruin his idea of her as an innocent and pure person who is untainted by the wretched adult world. Accordingly, he calls Faith Cavendish, since he has apparently no qualms about using her for sex. In this moment, then, readers see that Holden's reverent attitude toward Jane has nothing to do with whether or not he respects women and everything to do with his unwillingness to sully his private conception of her.

CHAPTER 10

Holden decides to go downstairs to the Lavender Room, where the hotel serves drinks and hosts bands. As he puts on a new shirt, he considers calling his little sister, Phoebe, whom he cares about very much. He notes that Phoebe is surprisingly intelligent, funny, and creative, and he momentarily gets lost in his thoughts about the fictional detective named Hazel Weatherfield that Phoebe often writes about. These thoughts please him, since he thinks Phoebe is one of the few people who truly understands him. However, he decides against calling her because he's afraid that his parents will pick up the phone.

By this point in the novel, it is evident that Holden tends to idealize people, appreciating them first and foremost for what they stand for in his mind. Whereas Jane represents his idea of the perfect woman (and, to a certain extent, somebody uncorrupted by adulthood), Phoebe represents his nostalgic feelings about the innocence of childhood. Although he wants to be seen as an adult as he makes his way through the city, he thinks that the only person who truly knows him is his little sister—a sign of his weariness of the adult world, which he thinks is incapable of understanding him.

Once in the Lavender Room, Holden tries to order a scotch and soda, but the waiter asks to see some proof that he's old enough to drink. Annoyed, he orders a Coke and settles into his table, listening to a band he thinks is quite bad. As he does so, he casts flirtatious looks at a table of three women sitting nearby, though he doesn't find them very attractive. Still, he convinces himself that one of them is pretty, so he asks if she'd like to dance. Her name is Bernice Krebs, and he's surprised by how good she is at dancing. As they dance, he maintains a steady stream of conversation in her ear, but it's clear that she's uninterested in talking, since she barely responds to him. Because of this, Holden concludes that she's a "moron," though this doesn't stop him from trying to kiss her.

Trying to posture as an adult, Holden boldly asks Bernice to dance, clearly hoping that this will make him look sophisticated and experienced. As if wanting to take this charade one step further, he tries to talk to her while they dance, a move that makes him look rather desperate for human interaction. This, however, doesn't occur to him, which is why he reacts rather mean-spiritedly to Bernice's lack of interest in making conversation. In this scene, then, he once again fluctuates between immaturity and maturity. On one hand, he puts himself in a very adult situation, but it is this very situation (and his naïveté while navigating his way through it) that makes him seem young and inexperienced.

Bernice rejects Holden's advance, eventually asking him how old he is. This offends him, but he still sits down uninvited at her table when they finish dancing. Before long, though, he sees that the three women are obsessed with spotting movie stars in the city, and this strikes him as vapid and depressing. Playing on their obsession with celebrities, he even lies and says that he just saw the actor Gary Cooper, and one of them claims to have also seen him—an interaction that only further depresses Holden. Before long, they get up to leave without offering to pay for the drinks they had before Holden sat down with them. And though he wouldn't have let them pay, the fact that they assumed he would pick up the bill annoys him.

Holden's frustration with the three women in the bar once again reveals his hypocrisy. Although it's perhaps true that their obsession with something as arbitrary as spotting a celebrity is rather shallow, it is no shallower than his own determination to spend time with them simply because they're women. In fact, he didn't even find them attractive when he first saw them, but he still gravitated toward them simply because he fixated on the idea of passing time with a group of older women. This, of course, has to do with his sudden loneliness, illustrating just how eager he is to find some company now that he has left his peers behind.

CHAPTER 11

In the hotel lobby, Holden thinks again about Jane Gallagher and Stradlater, hoping that nothing happened between them on their date. He then remembers the summer he spent with Jane in Maine. Their families rented neighboring houses, and Holden and Jane spent virtually all of their time together. They usually just played checkers, but they would sometimes go to the movies and hold hands with each other. This, Holden says, is as close as they usually came to physical intimacy, though he recounts one time when they went beyond simply holding hands. They were playing checkers, and Jane's alcoholic stepfather entered and asked where his cigarettes were. Jane didn't respond, but when her stepfather left, a single tear fell onto the checkboard. Seeing this, Holden got up and sat next to her, taking her in his arms and kissing her face—everywhere, that is, except her lips.

Even the most romantic and physical memory Holden has of Jane is quite innocent. Although it's true that he kissed her all over her face, it's clear that their relationship was fairly platonic, and his affection in this moment was mostly aimed at making her feel better. As a result, his thoughts about Jane remain void of any true sexual chemistry, though the fact that they used to hold hands enables him to think of their bond as containing the promise *of something more serious—something more adult. Because they never actually acted out any romantic feelings, Holden obsesses over someday advancing their relationship. This is why he's always so hesitant to contact her, knowing that she might reject his advance and thus shatter his fantasy of one day becoming a serious couple.*

Holden remembers how happy he used to be when he held Jane's hand and says that she's the only person he ever showed Allie's baseball mitt. As he thinks these thoughts, he sits in the lobby in a chair that has a disgusting stain on it, and he suddenly feels depressed. Wanting to get away from the hotel, he decides to go to a piano bar called Ernie's that D.B. once took him to. Accordingly, he hails a taxi and thinks about Ernie, the bar's piano player. Although he likes listening to him play, Holden can't help but feel that Ernie is *too* good at piano. After having this thought, Holden admits that he's not entirely sure what he means—all he knows is that he enjoys listening to Ernie play but dislikes the fact that Ernie plays like somebody who knows he's an excellent musician.

Holden's memories of Jane provide a stark contrast to his current circumstances. As he thinks about the happy times he spent with her in Maine, he sits in a rundown hotel lobby. Unfortunately, this only proves to him that he's right to fear the process of growing up, since his life has apparently gone downhill even in past two years. To take his mind off this, he decides to go to Ernie's, once more attempting to outrun his emotions through spontaneity. On another note, the thoughts he has about Ernie once again highlight his rather absurd ideas about "phoniness." Of course, he's right to think that many people put on a certain front that doesn't align with their true personas, but in this case it's ridiculous to criticize a performer for doing this, since this is simply part of the job. That Holden gets so annoyed even by a showman's "phoniness" only emphasizes just how intolerant he is of anything he thinks is inauthentic.

CHAPTER 12

On his way to Ernie's, Holden strikes up a conversation with his cab driver, Horwitz. When he asks about **the ducks in the Central Park lagoon**, Horwitz becomes angry at the stupidity of his question, shouting that the fish have it worse than the ducks, since they have no choice but to stay in the frozen water. However, he points out that the fish survive even in the ice because "it's their nature" to adapt to the circumstances. Holden appreciates Horwitz's willingness to consider the question, but he decides to let the matter slide because the driver seems like such a sensitive conversational partner. Nevertheless, he invites Horwitz to have a drink with him when they reach Ernie's, though Horwitz declines, dropping him off and reminding him that nature takes care of the fish in the lagoon.

Holden doesn't like not knowing what happens to the ducks during the winter. The fact that he's unsure about their future mirrors his uncertainty regarding his own future and signals how much he dislikes change. What he fails to realize, though, is that the ducks' desertion of the Central Park lagoon is part of the migratory pattern they undergo every year, meaning that winter doesn't force them to change, but actually reinforces their standard routine. Horwitz seemingly recognizes this, which is why he concerns himself with the fish, since the fish have no choice but to simply hunker down and deal with the winter. But even this, he insists, isn't something to worry about, since all animals are used to finding ways to survive. Unlike Horwitz, Holden remains unable to simply accept the patterns of nature (and, by extension, the natural trajectory of his own life), instead fixating on these rather trivial matters because he doesn't want to think about his own problems.

At Ernie's, Holden is disgusted to find the place full of "phonies" from fancy colleges and prep schools. In one conversation, he overhears a guy he refers to as "Joe Yale" describing a fellow student's suicide attempt. As Joe Yale tells this story to his date, he attempts to slide his hand up her skirt. As if this scene doesn't aggravate Holden enough, he's forced to sit at a table in the back, where he can hardly see Ernie, who has a mirror set up by the piano so that everyone can see his face while he plays—something Holden hates, since he himself wouldn't even want people to clap for him if he were a piano player.

Holden's sense of being alone is heightened by his surroundings. As he looks around Ernie's, he sees that even somebody as insensitive as "Joe Yale" is with a date. In order to keep himself from thinking about his own loneliness, then, Holden once again thinks about how much he hates "phoniness," this time directing his scorn toward Ernie's showboating ways even though he came all this way just to see Ernie in the first place.

As Holden takes in the scene, a young woman named Lillian Simmons approaches him. Lillian used to date D.B., and Holden thinks she's a terrible "phony." When she reaches his table, she says it's "marvelous" to see him and wastes no time before asking about D.B. As she talks, she and her date—a man in a Navy uniform—block the only passageway through the tables, making Holden feel simultaneously awkward and annoyed at how little she cares that she's holding up an entire group of people behind her. Holden even suspects that she enjoys being the kind of person who would hold up a crowd. When she invites him to come sit with her and her date, he lies and says he was just leaving to meet a girl. Feeling that people always ruin things for him, he says goodbye and leaves.

Despite his feelings of loneliness, Holden immediately rejects Lillian's offer to sit with her and her date. Unsurprisingly, this is because he thinks she's a "phony." This decision fits into a larger pattern in Holden's life: when he feels lonely, he wants to spend time with people, but as soon as he actually starts talking to another person, he becomes so critical of them that he can't stand to be in their presence, so he alienates himself once more.

CHAPTER 13

Feeling terrible for running from Ernie's, Holden walks 41 blocks back to his hotel, thinking about how he wished he still had the pair of gloves someone stole from him at Pencey. This causes him to reflect upon the fact that he's somewhat cowardly when it comes to getting into fights. Although he likes to think he would fight the person who stole his gloves if given the chance, he knows he would do nothing but ask for them back, ultimately shying away from direct confrontation.

Holden's feelings of cowardliness reflect his low self-esteem. While he doesn't necessarily always hold himself to as high a standard as he holds other people in his life, this doesn't mean that he has particularly good self-esteem. To that end, it becomes apparent in this moment that he tends to beat himself up for failing to behave in certain ways.

As Holden thinks about his lost gloves and his own cowardliness, he becomes more and more depressed. Because of this, he decides that he'd like to get drunk, noting that he's capable of drinking quite a bit of liquor without getting sick. This, at least, is what happened when he and a friend at the Whooton School split a pint of scotch one night—although he puked before going to bed, he claims that this is because he forced himself to do it. With alcohol on his mind, he starts to enter a run-down bar but stops when two drunkards stumble outside. This deters him from entering, so he simply returns to the hotel.

In addition to the fact that Holden's impulse to get drunk is an unhealthy way to deal with depression, it spotlights his escapist attitude. Rather than actually reflecting upon what's bothering him, he wants to run away from his problems by getting drunk—a naïve idea, since turning to alcohol does nothing to actually address a person's problems and, in some cases, can exacerbate feelings of depression. Preparing to step into the adult world of a New York City bar, he suddenly loses his nerve when he sees two haggard men stumble outside. That he decides to turn away after seeing this only indicates once more that he's not quite ready or mature enough to enter certain adult situations.

While taking the elevator back to his hotel room, Holden meets Maurice, the elevator operator. Maurice offers to send a prostitute to his room for $5, and though he immediately regrets it, Holden accepts. At this point, he privately admits that he's a virgin, though he's had many chances to have sex. Every time he's gotten the opportunity to lose his virginity, he says, something has happened to ruin the moment. He also suggests that he's too attentive to girls' feelings, unlike people like Stradlater, who work hard to convince their dates to have sex with them. Whenever a girl tells Holden to stop doing whatever he's doing, he listens, feeling sorry for them because he thinks they're "dumb." For this reason, he decides that losing his virginity to a prostitute is probably a good idea, since it will allow him to simply get the experience over with.

Holden's treatment of women is a bit confusing, since he approaches his romantic relationships with a mixture of condescending misogyny and—surprisingly—respect. On one hand, he doesn't want to do anything with a woman if she doesn't want to, setting him apart from people like Stradlater, who focus solely on their own physical desires. On the other hand, though, Holden says he doesn't pressure women into having sex with him because he thinks they're "dumb." This is most likely an attempt to feel superior to his dates so that he doesn't have to admit to himself that he's intimidated by the prospect of having sex. Indeed, Holden thinks of himself as a "sex maniac," but he hasn't even lost his virginity. In an attempt to preserve his self-image as a mature adult, then, he condescendingly suggests that the reason he hasn't had sex is because he feels so much more intelligent than his dates.

Back in his hotel room, Holden waits for Maurice to send a prostitute. Before long, a young woman named Sunny arrives. Holden is surprised to see that she doesn't look much older than him and that she seems rather nervous. Treating her with extreme formality, he introduces himself as Jim Steele, and when she asks his age, he claims to be 22—a statement she challenges. This exchange depresses Holden, who suddenly feels very uninspired when Sunny undresses and sits on his lap. Asking if she feels like simply talking for a while, he tries to make small talk before eventually telling Sunny that he recently had an operation on his "clavichord," which he says is embedded in the spinal canal. Because of this, he insists, he can't have sex.

It is unsurprising that Holden doesn't go through with his plan to have sex with a prostitute, since it's clear that he's quite nervous about engaging in sexual intercourse, which is a significant right of passage into adulthood. Even though he constantly postures as an adult, the truth of the matter is that he's only a teenager yearning for a sense of acceptance and connection. If he can't bring himself to have sex with somebody he knows, it's extraordinarily unlikely that he'll be able to convince himself to have sex with a prostitute, since this experience would no doubt be overwhelming to a young person who's never become so intimate with another person. Furthermore, the lack of connection between Sunny and Holden emphasizes Holden's overall loneliness, which is why he asks if she simply wants to talk. When she makes it clear that she's uninterested in doing this, though, he finally lies and says he can't have sex because he had an operation on his "clavichord," which, despite what he says, is a small stringed keyboard popular in the Late Middle Ages.

Sunny is frustrated by Holden's lack of sexual desire, telling him that Maurice woke her up specifically to meet him. Trying to calm her down, Holden assures her that he'll still pay her for her time. He then hands her a $5 bill, but she claims he owes her $10. Refusing to pay more than the agreed-upon amount, he picks up her dress and hands it to her. After she gets dressed, she says, "So long, crumb-bum," and leaves.

Holden agreed to have Maurice send a prostitute to his room because he was feeling lonely. Unfortunately, though, his time with Sunny has only emphasized the extent to which he feels alienated from his surroundings, since he can't seem to connect with her on the level he wants (to be fair, this is because his attempts at conversation are out of place in this particular situation).

CHAPTER 14

Alone in his hotel room once again, Holden starts talking aloud to Allie. He does this sometimes when he feels very depressed. When Holden speaks to his dead brother, he remembers a time when he told Allie that he couldn't come biking with Holden and his friend in Maine. At the time, Allie was very disappointed but didn't argue, but now Holden wishes he had included him. For this reason, he talks to Allie when he gets sad, telling him to go get his bike. Getting into bed after saying this, Holden tries to pray but finds himself unable to get into the right mindset, mostly because he is "sort of an atheist" and tends to dislike religion because most ministers he's met speak in a phony tone of voice.

That Holden speaks to his dead brother when he's depressed confirms that he has yet to process his emotions about Allie's death. Feeling sad and alone, he tries to find comfort in reaching out to Allie, but this effort is futile because Holden is an atheist and therefore doesn't actually believe that his brother can hear him. As a result, his attempt to connect with Allie fails, leaving him feeling even more alone than before. Worse, he can't even get himself to pray in a general sense, so he focuses once again on "phoniness" instead of thinking about his emotions.

Unable to sleep, Holden lights a cigarette and sits on the bed smoking until a knock sounds on the door. Jumping up, he opens the door to find Maurice and Sunny. Maurice demands $5, claiming that he and Holden had agreed that he would pay a grand total of $10 to sleep with Sunny. Standing his ground, Holden refuses to pay Maurice more money, so Maurice pins him while Sunny takes his wallet. At this point, Holden begins to cry and accuses Sunny and Maurice of stealing from him, so Maurice pushes him. Still, Holden continues to disparage them, so Maurice snaps his fingers against his crotch. Furious, Holden calls him a "dirty moron," prompting Maurice to punch him in the stomach. As he crumples to the floor, Sunny and Maurice leave with their five extra dollars.

Throughout The Catcher in the Rye, *Holden encounters many different kinds of phoniness. Some of the forms of inauthenticity he comes across are admittedly not very pronounced, as is the case when he takes issue with Lillian Simmons's pleasantries or Stradlater's secret messiness, but some are quite glaring. This is the case in this moment, as Maurice behaves dishonestly by changing the price that he and Holden originally agreed upon. Needless to say, he does this because he recognizes that Holden is quite young and inexperienced, so Maurice takes advantage of his relative helplessness. And yet, Holden refuses to back down, even though it's obvious that he's putting himself in danger by protesting. In the same way that he refused to stop calling Stradlater a moron when they got into a fight, he now continues to provoke Maurice, demonstrating yet again his self-destructive streak.*

When Sunny and Maurice leave, Holden imagines that he's in an action movie, pretending that he's been shot in the gut by an enemy. Walking around the room with his hand over his make-believe bullet wound, he envisions how he would take his revenge if he were a true action hero, but this fantasy soon dissolves, leaving him even more depressed than before. Getting back in bed, he briefly feels like committing suicide by jumping out the window, telling himself that he would really do this if he knew somebody would put a blanket over his body so people couldn't gape at him when he landed.

The extent of Holden's depression is rather alarming. At first, his sadness seems more or less average, since most people would feel lonely while staying in a low-rate hotel in the middle of New York City as a wayward 16-year-old. However, it becomes clear in this moment that Holden is dealing with something a bit more serious, since his discontent leads him to fantasize about suicide.

CHAPTER 15

When Holden wakes up the next morning (after only a few hours of sleep), he thinks once again about calling Jane, but decides that he isn't in the "mood." Instead, he calls Sally Hayes, who he thinks is the kind of person who seems intelligent and sophisticated but is actually somewhat vapid and unintelligent. Still, he makes plans to go to a play with her that afternoon in the city. During their short conversation, he can't help but cringe at the way she speaks, hating the "phony" words she chooses. Still, he commits to meeting her. When he hangs up the phone, he looks out the window and sees that the "perverts" across the way have shut their blinds, suddenly acting quite prudish.

Holden can never bring himself to actually call Jane. This is because he has romanticized her as a person, meaning that any future interactions he has with her will threaten to ruin the idealized version of her he's built in his mind. Sally Hayes, on the other hand, is someone Holden has already decided is imperfect, so he has no trouble calling her. The only problem, of course, is that he immediately resents her for being a "phony." In turn, he once again cycles through his pattern of yearning for human company just to eventually criticize whomever he comes into contact with.

Holden checks out of the hotel and goes to Grand Central Station to store his bags in a locker. He then goes to a small sandwich shop for breakfast. While eating, he meets two nuns carrying cheap suitcases that remind him of one of his former roommates, who had very inexpensive luggage. This memory makes him sad, because he remembers that his roommate used to hide his bags because he didn't want anyone to compare them to Holden's. Wanting to help, Holden decided to hide his own bags, but then his roommate took out Holden's suitcases and put them on display, clearly hoping that everyone would think that Holden's bags were actually his.

The story Holden recalls about his roommate's suitcases illustrates how inauthentic and petty people can be. It also demonstrates that Holden is capable of compassion and kindness, since he tried to make his roommate feel better about not owning expensive luggage. As soon as he did this, though, his roommate took advantage of his thoughtfulness, once again proving to Holden that people are often "phony" and dishonest.

Holden starts talking to the nuns in the sandwich shop and learns that they've come to New York City to teach high school. One of them, he discovers, is an English teacher, so he tells her that English is his best subject. This incites a long conversation about literature, in which they discuss *Romeo and Juliet*. As they talk about the play, though, Holden wonders if the nun is comfortable with its sexual content, noting that she's surprisingly pretty and casual for someone in her position. Though low on funds, he decides to give the nuns $10, insisting that they take it even though they initially refuse. Then, when they leave, he tries to pay for their lunch, but they assure him that he's already done enough. Still, he wishes he gave them more money.

The excessive kindness Holden shows these nuns is in keeping with his affinity for anything that represents innocence and purity. Although he likes to think of himself as a "sex maniac," he has already made it quite clear that the prospect of actually having sex frightens him. As a result, he exists in a strange middle ground between sexual innocence and sexual intrigue, idealizing both but never bringing himself to fully commit to either side. In this sense, he thinks constantly about sex—even while talking to a nun about Shakespeare—but never actually tries to engage in sexual intercourse. Similarly, he aligns himself with the Catholic Church by giving the nuns more than he can afford to give, but he never actually commits himself to religion. Simply put, he idealizes these nuns as symbols of the kind of innocence and incorruptibility that he yearns to see in his own everyday life.

CHAPTER 16

Holden decides to buy a record for Phoebe. The album is for children, and Holden knows it might be hard to find, but he has wanted to buy it for Phoebe ever since he heard it at Pencey. Making his way to a record store, he decides to look for Phoebe in the park after he buys the album, since she usually spends her Sundays in the park. When he nears a church, he starts walking behind a family dressed in clothes indicating that they don't have much money. The parents are walking together without paying attention to their young son, who sings, "**If a body catch a body coming through the rye**." Holden finds the boy's voice touching, and he appreciates that he's simply singing for the sake of singing. Consequently, the song makes Holden happier than he's been all day.

Holden's thoughts about Phoebe and the joy he feels in response to the young boy's song both indicate his idealization of purity and childhood. Holden can tell that the boy in front of the church comes from a poor family, but this doesn't stop the young child from singing in a sweet, carefree way. To Holden, this is very touching and significant, since he wishes he himself could embody such unbridled happiness despite the various hardships that have befallen him throughout life.

Holden goes to Broadway to buy theater tickets for his date with Sally. He despises the way everyone around him is dressed up and excited to go to the movies or a play. He finds it especially despicable that these people actively want to spend their Sundays doing these things, so he hastily ducks into a record store and buys the album for Phoebe. Though it's rather expensive, purchasing it for her once again improves his mood. Eager to give it to her, he hurries toward the park, though not before stopping in a drugstore and calling Jane. When her mother answers, though, he immediately hangs up, feeling as if he has to be in the right "mood" to converse with a girl's mother. He then remembers to buy the theater tickets.

Holden comes close to actually talking to Jane in this moment. This is most likely because he's so depressed by his feeling that everyone around him is "phony." Being on Broadway depresses him, making him think of humanity as trivial and silly, though it's worth noting that he himself is doing the same thing as everyone around him—buying tickets for a show. Nonetheless, he's fed up with everyone else's shallowness, so he wants to speak to Jane, whom he thinks is perfect. When he calls, though, he once again backs down, perhaps sensing that he wouldn't be able to take it if Jane ended up somehow shattering his conception of her.

Holden gets tickets for him and Sally to go to a play starring several famous actors. He knows that Sally will be immensely pleased to see this production, but he himself is hardly excited. This is because he hates actors, thinking that they never actually behave like real people. Or, rather, he dislikes it when actors are *too* good at acting, since this only reminds him that they've studied their parts and worked hard to be realistic. Worst of all, Holden constantly worries that an actor is going to do something "phony," which makes it hard for him to enjoy the theater.

It's unsurprising that Holden dislikes the theater, since he can't stand the idea of somebody acting inauthentically. At the same time, it's worth pointing out that he can't quite stay away from the things he supposedly hates. In fact, he has already been to a movie, two nightclub concerts, and is now about to go to a Broadway show. Despite his scorn for show business, then, he is apparently quite drawn to it, making him no different from the people he so harshly judges.

Having secured theater tickets, Holden goes to the park to find Phoebe. When he arrives, though, she's nowhere to be seen, so he asks a little girl if she knows his sister. The girl is busy lacing up her roller-skates, and Holden gladly helps her tighten them as she informs him that Phoebe is most likely at the **Museum of Natural History**, since the classes in their school have been taking turns going there on the weekends. The little girl's class went last Saturday, so she thinks Phoebe is probably there with her class this weekend. This delights Holden, who decides to make his way to the museum. Just as he's about to leave, though, he remembers that it's Sunday, not Saturday. All the same, he goes anyway.

Holden isn't looking forward to his date with Sally, so he concentrates on tracking down his sister, one of the only people he genuinely respects. In doing so, he tries to forget that he has made a plan to go to the theater with somebody he doesn't even respect (Sally), thereby perpetuating his cycle of loneliness, human connection, and cynicism.

Holden thinks about how comforting it is that the displays in the **Museum of Natural History** are frozen in time. He fondly remembers the fieldtrips he took here as a kid each year, recalling that the glass display cases never changed. This is the beauty of the museum, he thinks—you can always go back and discover that the only thing that has changed is you yourself. This, he believes, is how life should be, since he thinks certain things should always stay the same, though he recognizes that this is impossible.

Holden, who fears and hates adulthood, likes things that don't change. Needless to say, the museum displays fit this description, since they freeze things in time. This is an especially appealing concept to Holden because of Allie's death. When Allie died, Holden effectively froze him in an ideal state of childhood innocence. Unfortunately, though, most things in real life are in a state of constant change, ultimately forcing Holden to recognize that it's impossible to hold onto his connection to Allie forever. The museum, however, helps him believe that he'll always be able to preserve an untarnished memory of his brother.

Despite his nostalgic thoughts about **the museum**, Holden can't bring himself to go inside when he arrives. Suddenly, the idea of entering seems vastly unpleasant, so he hails a taxi and makes his way to where he's going to meet Sally, though the idea of going on a date with her doesn't appeal to him, either.

Holden can't enter the museum because he knows that the unchanging displays are inaccurate representations of the way time works. Because he wants to preserve the illusion that certain things can always stay the same, he decides not to enter the museum, knowing that he won't be able to keep thinking this way if he comes face to face with the glass cases and fully admits to himself that they are simply recreations of history, and thus the very embodiment of "phoniness."

CHAPTER 17

Holden has time to spare before Sally arrives, especially since she's always late. As he waits, he looks at the many attractive women who pass him by, and though this entertains him, he can't help but think about how they'll probably all grow up to marry boring men. He then ruminates on what it means to be boring, concluding that some boring people aren't so bad, since most people have hidden talents that might redeem them. When Sally finally arrives, Holden can't stay mad at her for being late because she looks so good. However, he gets annoyed at the sound of her voice and the "phony" words she chooses. Nonetheless, though, he focuses on how attractive she is, feeling glad that he decided to call her.

Even if it's true that Holden is often hard-headed, stubborn, or unfair to the people in his life, it's hard to deny that he's rather complex. As he looks around at the women passing him while he waits for Sally, he is both critical and sympathetic, imagining their future lives and eventually demonstrating his ability to empathize with individuals who most people hardly think about. This sympathetic worldview quickly shatters, though, when Sally arrives and Holden immediately finds her annoying but still shallowly embraces her simply because of her good looks.

On the cab ride to the theater, Holden convinces Sally to "horse around" with him, though she doesn't want to at first because—according to Holden—she doesn't want to mess up her lipstick. After they kiss for a while, Holden suddenly decides that he wants to marry her, and he blurts out that he loves her. "Oh, darling, I love you too," Sally responds before telling him that he should let his hair grow out. This annoys Holden, but he doesn't say anything.

This is the first time in the novel that Holden has actually made a genuine effort to connect with another person. When he does this, his emotions suddenly fly out of control, and he overstates his feelings for Sally. This suggests that he's in desperate need of human connection. The instant he receives this kind of attention, then, he gushes with appreciation. And yet, he immediately returns to his normal state of cynicism when Sally says something that strikes him as annoying—indicating that he isn't quite as enthralled with her as he thinks. Instead, he has simply found a way to idealize her, even though he already thinks of her as imperfect.

Holden doesn't find the play as bad as he expected it to be, but he still thinks it's "on the crappy side." The actors' performances seem phony and conceited to him, but Sally loves it. During the first intermission, she runs into a boy she once met at another school, and they spend the entirety of the intermission talking about the play. The way they converse disgusts Holden, especially when the boy refers to the actors as "angels," but there's nothing he can do to stop them from talking. To his horror, he also has to endure their "phony" conversation during the second intermission. By the time Holden and Sally finally leave the boy behind after the play, Holden feels as if he hates Sally, though he agrees to go ice-skating at Radio City when she enthusiastically proposes the idea.

Anyone who seems self-confident or comfortable in society strikes Holden as "phony," so it's no surprise that he strongly dislikes the boy Sally talks to during intermission. To make matters worse, he also resents this young man for encroaching upon his time with Sally, since he has been desperate for human interaction—so desperate, in fact, that he agrees to go ice-skating with Sally even though he has decided that he hates her.

Holden suspects that Sally only wants to go skating because the rink gives girls a small dress to wear. And though it annoys him that Sally purposefully walks in front of him so he can see how her behind looks in this dress, he can't deny that she looks good in it. When they finally get on the ice, it becomes clear that they're both terrible skaters, so they soon retire to a small bar-restaurant near the rink, where Holden tries to order a scotch and soda but ends up having to order Coke. As they sit there, Sally asks if he's going to come over on Christmas Eve to help her trim the tree—an invitation she extended in a letter to which he claims to have responded. Irritated, Holden tells her that he's going to come.

Holden's conflicted feelings about women arise once again, as he struggles to interpret Sally's behavior. Even if he's right that Sally only wants to go ice-skating so that Holden will see her behind in the small dress, one would think that this would flatter him. Instead, though, he finds her actions somehow irritating, perhaps because he doesn't really want to pursue a romantic relationship with her, despite his previous declaration that he loves her. In this way, he once again delays his foray into the adult world of romance.

On edge because of the play and because of Sally's question about Christmas Eve, Holden suddenly leans forward and asks if she ever gets fed up with stuff like school. She admits that she's often bored in class, but he presses on, saying that this isn't what he means. He says he hates school and everything else: taxis, New York, phony guys like the one they met at the play, having to take elevators, going to the tailor—as he goes on, Sally interrupts him and asks him not to shout, which he finds funny because he isn't raising his voice. Still, he goes on, saying that he never wants to become the kind of person who cares about his car. He also says that he's only in New York because of Sally and would otherwise be off in a cabin in the woods.

In many ways, Holden's disillusionment is typical for a teenager trying to figure out his place in the world. However, that he finds such nonconsequential matters (like the existence of taxis, for instance) so irritating suggests that he's dealing with something more serious than regular teenage angst. Perhaps recognizing that Holden is disproportionately upset with everyday life, Sally asks him to calm down, but he fails to see why she doesn't share his misgivings about life. In turn, he alienates himself from her even though it's clear that he needs somebody to help him address his negative feelings, which are characteristic of true depression.

Holden tells Sally that she should try going to a boys' school sometime, since boys' schools are "full of phonies." The only point of these schools, he argues, is to someday lead the kind of life that might allow you to buy a Cadillac. He also laments the ways in which other students group together according to various categories, pointing out that all the Catholics and athletes and academics always flock to one another. Seizing on the idea of leaving New York, he suggests that he and Sally should run away to New England and live in a cabin together. They could get married, he says, and he could find a job and chop wood to stay warm in the winter. "You can't just *do* something like that," Sally says, annoyed by his enthusiasm. She then asks him to stop yelling, even though he insists that he's being quiet.

Listing the ways in which he feels isolated from his peers at every boys' school he's attended, Holden tries to express his disillusionment with the idea that everyone has to play the game of life by a certain set of rules. Unlike everyone else, Holden is uninterested in following the rules because he has no desire to achieve the various goals that people assume all young men want to achieve. This is why he proposes that he and Sally elope to New England. In response, Sally says, "You can't just do something like that," thereby aligning herself with the kind of people who think that there are certain rules everyone must follow. To step outside of these rules, she thinks, is simply not an option.

Sally reminds Holden that they're too young to go off on their own, insisting that they'll have plenty of time in life to do whatever they want. This, Holden says, is exactly the point—by the time they're adults, they won't *want* to pick up and escape to the cabins of New England. By then, he argues, they'll have too many obligations and will be wrapped up in the monotonous ins and outs of everyday life. He then says that Sally doesn't understand him, and she agrees with this statement, adding that *he* probably doesn't even understand himself. In response, he calls her a "royal pain in the ass," and she begins to cry. Holden quickly apologizes, but also can't keep himself from laughing. She then tells him to leave, so he listens to her, thinking as he goes that he probably wouldn't have wanted to elope with her anyway.

During this exchange, it becomes clear that Holden is afraid of succumbing to what he perceives as the mundane reality of adulthood. Although he's adamant about never becoming a phony, he obviously thinks that he will inevitably lead a boring and uninspired life someday. Consequently, he wants to do anything he can to avoid this fate, which is why he's willing to break all of life's supposed rules. However, lashing out at Sally is no way to achieve this, which is why he winds up alone and unhappy once again as he leaves Sally at the restaurant.

CHAPTER 18

Holden stops into a drugstore for a sandwich after leaving Sally. Once again, he goes into a phone booth and thinks about calling Jane Gallagher, wanting to take her dancing. Before calling her, though, he gets lost in a memory he has of Jane telling him why she was dating a guy who Holden disliked. According to Holden, Jane's boyfriend was conceited, but Jane insisted that he actually had an inferiority complex. Holden, for his part, thinks that girls often say boys have inferiority complexes when, in reality, they're simply jerks. He also thinks that girls frequently think boys who *actually* have inferiority complexes are jerks. Turning his attention back to the present moment, Holden calls Jane but hangs up when nobody answers.

Forever attuned to how people present themselves in public, Holden can't stand the idea of Jane dismissing her boyfriend's conceited behavior. Given that Holden himself is the kind of person who dislikes and lashes out at people he thinks are conceited, it seems likely that he *has an inferiority complex. Accordingly, he wants people like him to get credit for their private struggles, not people who are well-liked and confident. What he fails to realize, though, is that Jane's remark about her boyfriend's inferiority complex proves that everyone deals with various hardships that aren't always evident to others.*

Holden takes out his address book and sifts through it, hoping to find somebody who might be free for the evening. The problem, though, is that he only has three people in his address book: Jane, a teacher named Mr. Antolini who used to teach at Elkton Hills, and his father's work number. Instead of calling any of these people, he decides to reach out to Carl Luce, an older boy he knows from the Whooton School. Carl is a very smart person, but Holden never actually liked him. All the same, he decides that Carl might like to have dinner with him so that they can engage in a "slightly intellectual conversation." Carl now attends Columbia, and though he declines Holden's offer to meet for dinner, he agrees to have drinks at 10:00 that evening.

Once more, Holden finds himself yearning for human interaction. He has just squandered his chance to connect with Sally, but he already wants to reach out to somebody again, clearly not liking the idea of being alone. When he gets in touch with Carl Luce, though, it becomes clear that he is simply going to repeat his pattern of contacting people he doesn't like, remembering he doesn't like them, insulting them, and alienating himself yet again.

To pass the time before he's supposed to meet Carl Luce, Holden goes to the movies at Radio City Music Hall. 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 musician seemed to enjoy it so much. Because the movie is set during wartime, Holden thinks about his brother D.B.'s experience in World War II, and this leads him to consider the fact that he himself could never be in the military because it would require him to commit to something for such a long time. This, he thinks, is the problem with joining the army, in addition to the idea of having to spend so much time with people like Stradlater or Ackley, who Holden thinks are the sort of people who would be in the military.

In characteristic fashion, Holden balks at the idea of belonging to any group of people. Indeed, he finds the idea of joining the army unappealing not because he might have to put himself in danger, but because he would have to fraternize with people he thinks are inauthentic and shallow. Furthermore, the mere fact that he goes to the cinema is worth noting, since he supposedly hates movies so much. Once again, he reveals his own hypocrisy, inadvertently casting himself as just as "phony" as the people in his life whom he criticizes so harshly.

Holden thinks about the books D.B. gave him after coming home from World War II. Although D.B. said he hated being in the army, he loved Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*, which Holden found quite boring and "phony." In contrast, Holden loves *The Great Gatsby*. As he thinks about this, he suddenly declares to himself that he's glad the atomic bomb has been invented, deciding that if there's ever another war, he'll gladly volunteer to sit right atop the bomb as it plunges toward the enemy.

Even though Holden dislikes school, he is a rather voracious reader. This proves that his academic problems have nothing to do with his actual intelligence, but rather with his unwillingness to apply himself. As he sits in the movie theater and thinks about war, he has yet another suicidal fantasy, though in this one he imagines himself as a martyr, suggesting that he is perhaps more self-obsessed or conceited than he'd like to admit. At the same time, though, this is still a suicidal thought, once again signaling the worrying depths of his unhappiness.

CHAPTER 19

Holden waits for Carl Luce at the Wicker Bar in the Seton Hotel, which he describes as a very fancy place. As he waits, he thinks that the establishment is filled with so many phonies that it's enough to make a person "hate everybody in the world." Passing the time before Luce arrives, he drinks scotch and sodas and listens to a French cocktail singer as she performs. He also keeps tabs on a group of men at the other end of the bar, thinking that they might be gay. This, he thinks, is something Luce will be able to confirm when he arrives, since Luce always knew more about sex than anybody at the Whooton School. In fact, he often informed Holden that somebody was gay, though Holden sometimes thought that Luce himself might be gay. Still, Holden respects Luce's vast knowledge of sex.

Again, Holden's disdain for "phonies" brings itself to bear on his mood. When he says that there are enough phonies in the Wicker Bar to make a person "hate everybody in the world," the reader can see his misanthropic tendencies, which encourage him to alienate himself from the people around him. Still, this attitude doesn't keep him from wondering about the group of men at the other end of the bar. Thinking about whether or not they're gay is a way for him to once again consider the supposed boundaries of what society deems acceptable when it comes to sex and romance. Although Holden's curiosity is tinged by his homophobic impulse to view gay men as profoundly different from him, it is also yet another testament to the fact that he is still navigating what it means to become a sexual being.

When Luce arrives, Holden points out the group of men at the other end of the bar and asks Luce if they're gay, but Luce only tells him to grow up. Holden then asks Luce about his sex life, and once again, Luce tells him to grow up. Eventually, though, Holden convinces Luce to tell him that he's in a relationship with an older woman, though Luce resists getting pulled into what he refers to as a "typical Caulfield conversation." As they talk, Luce periodically reminds Holden that he can't stay long, but this doesn't deter Holden from posing inappropriate questions, wanting badly to hear the vivid details of Luce's sex life. All the while, Holden feels himself getting drunker and drunker, but continues to pester Luce and eventually admits that his own sex life is "lousy." Luce, for his part, suggests that this is because he's immature.

Holden's incessant curiosity about Luce's sex life betrays his immature insecurities about his own romantic life, including his fears and confusion regarding homosexuality. Just as Holden seemed to purposefully sabotage his connection with Sally, he now does the same with Luce, pestering him even though it's clear that Luce is on the verge of abandoning him in the bar. Once again, then, he tries to alienate himself as soon as he puts himself in a situation in which he might actually connect with another person.

After a while, Holden says the main problem with his sex life is that he can't become intimate with a girl unless he actually likes her. In response, Luce says he should see a psychoanalyst. Because Luce's father is an analyst, Holden asks what would happen if he actually *did* go to therapy, and Luce informs him that a therapist would help him identify patterns in his thinking. He then tells Holden to call his father if he wants, though he says he doesn't care either way what Holden does. In response, Holden puts his hand on his shoulder and tells him he's a "real friendly bastard," at which point Luce gets up and announces that he has to leave. Before he goes, Holden asks him to have one more drink with him because he's lonely, but Luce doesn't listen, leaving Holden by himself at the bar.

Luce is not the first person to suggest that Holden should see a psychoanalyst. Indeed, Holden's own parents wanted to have him psychoanalyzed after he punched out all the windows in the garage in the aftermath of Allie's death. However, they apparently never followed through with this, which is why Holden finds himself curious about what, exactly, he would get out of therapy. As soon as Luce responds, though, Holden makes a mockery of him by displaying a false sense of camaraderie. Putting his hand on Luce and calling him a "real friendly bastard," he belittles his friend's attempt (half-hearted as it is) to help him. As a result, Luce leaves, ignoring Holden's confession that he's lonely.

CHAPTER 20

Holden stays at the Wicker Bar and gets drunk. At one point, he gets the waiter's attention and asks him to invite the French singer to have a drink with him, but he doubts the waiter will actually deliver the message. Still, he stays at the bar and continues to drink, thinking about calling Jane. Finally, at 1:00 in the morning, he stumbles outside while pretending he's been shot in the stomach. He's so drunk that he nearly convinces himself that he's bleeding, and he staggers into a phonebooth, where he thinks once more about calling Jane but calls Sally's house instead, infuriating both Sally and her grandmother for calling so late. Unbothered by Sally's annoyance, he informs her multiple times that he'll come over to help her trim the tree on Christmas Eve.

By this point, Holden has spun completely out of control. Sad and alone, he gets drunk because he thinks this is a way to drown his feelings. He also most likely sees drinking as a way of posturing as an adult, though the end result is that he winds up acting childish and stupid. Once more, he thinks about calling Jane, but he can't because to speak to her while drunk would obliterate his idea of their relationship as an innocent and pure bond unsullied by the hardships of adulthood. Accordingly, he calls Sally instead, knowing that his relationship with her has already been ruined, meaning there's nothing he can do to make things worse.

Returning to the bar after his phone conversation with Sally, Holden goes to the bathroom, fills the sink with cold water, and dunks his head into it. Next, he sits on the radiator until the bar's piano player comes in and tells him to go home. On his way out of the bathroom, he realizes he's crying, but he doesn't know why. While collecting his things, he tries to flirt with the woman working the hat-check window, even though she's old enough to be his mother. Thankfully, she's very kind and politely refuses his invitation to go on a date.

Holden is unwilling to acknowledge his loneliness and sadness, but this doesn't mean he can keep himself from exhibiting his emotions. In keeping with this, he discovers that he's crying as he exits the bathroom, and although he claims to not know why, it seems likely that he must understand—on a certain level—that he's deeply lonely. After all, why else would he invite the woman at the hat-check to go on a date? Unable to maintain a connection with anyone, he has spun out of control and thrust himself into the adult world, which only makes him feel more alienated and alone.

Holden walks to Central Park to check on **the ducks in the lagoon**. On his way, he drops the record he bought for Phoebe and nearly starts crying again, scooping up the broken pieces and putting them in his jacket pocket. When he finally reaches the park, he sees that the lagoon is partially frozen and that there are no ducks swimming in the water, so he makes his way to a bench and sits down, freezing because his head is still wet from plunging it into the sink at the Wicker Bar. Thinking he might catch pneumonia and die, he imagines his own funeral, which reminds him that he missed Allie's funeral because he was still in the hospital after having smashed the garage windows with his bare hand.

Unlike the ducks in the Central Park lagoon—who have adapted to the cold weather—Holden has trouble with adapting to the natural transitions in his life. As a teenager, he struggles constantly with change and is in the midst of something of an identity crisis, trying to figure out where he fits into a world that he finds largely overwhelming and abhorrent. The shattering of Phoebe's record only makes it even more difficult for Holden to believe that he can preserve a sense of childhood innocence. When he thinks of his own funeral while sitting next to the lagoon, he romanticizes the idea of eternal stasis, seeing death as perhaps the only way he'll ever be able to resist change. In addition, imagining his own funeral allows him to think about how sorry everyone in his life would be if he died, thereby helping him believe that the connections he has made are more meaningful than they actually seem.

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

Holden manages to snap out of his morbid fantasy about death by focusing on Phoebe—or, more specifically, on his relationship with Phoebe, which is one of the only things in his life that gives him a sense of belonging, acceptance, and love.

CHAPTER 21

Holden sneaks into his family's apartment by lying to the elevator operator, who is new to the building. Once inside the apartment, he slowly makes his way to Phoebe's room but finds it empty. Remembering that Phoebe likes to sleep in D.B.'s room, he creeps there and turns on the light. At first, Phoebe doesn't wake up, so Holden looks at her as she sleeps, thinking that children look much more peaceful than adults when they're asleep. Before waking her, he looks around the room, eventually finding Phoebe's school notebooks. Her writing and drawings delight him, especially when he sees that she signs her name "Phoebe Weatherfield Caulfield" even though her real middle name is Josephine.

This scene provides a familiar contrast between children and adults, a difference to which Holden is acutely attuned. As he looks at Phoebe's notebooks, he treasures her innocence and intelligence, both of which he thinks are uninfluenced by the corruptive adult world. At the same time, though, it's worth mentioning that he takes particular delight in Phoebe's precocious nature. For instance, he likes that Phoebe has a practiced signature that includes a false middle name. Interestingly enough, her decision to use "Weatherfield" as her middle name is hilariously mature, as if she understands the implicit sense of sophistication that comes with a name like Weatherfield. This strikes Holden as very funny, but his pleasure regarding Phoebe's eccentricities is noteworthy because what he seems to appreciate about her is that she is advanced for her age. Consequently, his idealization of her youthful purity strangely encompasses an appreciation of her adult-like traits, suggesting that he himself wants to embody a similar kind of maturity.

Holden wakes Phoebe, who's overjoyed to see him and immediately floods him with news, telling him about her role in an upcoming school play, a movie she saw that day, and that their parents aren't home because they're at a party. Hearing this, Holden begins to relax, though Phoebe is too distracted to answer his questions about when their parents will return. Soon enough, Phoebe realizes that Holden is home two days early. Instantly, she guesses that Holden has been kicked out of school yet again, and though Holden denies this at first, he eventually admits that she's right. Telling him that their father is going to kill him, Phoebe starts crying and refuses to talk to Holden, declining to face him even after he assures her that he'll be all right because he's going to go work on a ranch in Colorado.

It's somewhat odd that Holden has no complaints about Phoebe, considering that she apparently likes many of the things he hates. For example, she speaks at length about the theater and the movies, two things he can't stand. And yet, he loves her unconditionally. This suggests that he is quite capable of giving people the benefit of the doubt if he wants to, but that he actively searches for reasons to dislike most people. Even when Phoebe gets angry at him, he doesn't lash out at her like he would with anyone else. Instead, he reveals a far-fetched plan to move to Colorado, demonstrating once again his own immaturity and unrealistic worldview.

CHAPTER 22

After going into the living room to fetch a cigarette from a small box on the table, Holden reenters Phoebe's room. She is still "ostracizing" him, but she has at least started talking to him again, though only to repeat that their father is going to kill him. Again, he insists that he's moving to Colorado to work on a ranch, but she merely laughs at this idea, pointing out that he doesn't even know how to ride a horse. When she continues to scold Holden for failing out of Pencey, he asks her to stop trying to make him feel bad, telling her that everyone at Pencey is mean and that it's a terrible place. He says that even the nice teachers were still "phonies," and he tells her about how Mr. Spencer used to act completely different whenever Dr. Thurmer sat in on his classes.

In contrast to Holden, Phoebe is grounded and realistic, which is why she tries to help him see that he can't simply pick up and move to Colorado. Nonetheless, Holden makes his usual claim that his problems are society's fault, citing the rampant "phoniness" at Pencey as the primary reason he left. Of course, this simply isn't true, since the real reason he left is because he got kicked out for failing the majority of his classes. Rather than owning up to this, though, he tries to reframe the situation and act like he made a conscious decision to leave.

Phoebe doesn't say anything to Holden, but he can tell she's listening, so he keeps talking about how much he hates Pencey. He relates a story about a Pencey alumnus who visited the school and asked Holden and Stradlater to show him the bathroom because he wanted to see if his initials—which he had carved into the stall years before—were still there. This deeply depressed Holden, which is why he tells the story to Phoebe, trying to explain why he needed to get away from Pencey.

One of Holden's worst nightmares is the idea of becoming somebody who is so attached to a place like Pencey that he can't move on with his life. This is rather ironic, considering that Holden himself is extremely attached to the past and does whatever he can to trick himself into thinking that he can fight off inevitable changes. In the same way that Holden cherishes his memory of Allie and idealizes his conception of Jane, this alumnus sees his high school years as the best ones of his life. Funnily enough, though, Holden is unable to see the parallels between himself and this man.

Phoebe accuses Holden of never liking anything. When he argues this point, she challenges him to name one thing that he genuinely likes. At first, he dithers, asking if he has to think of something that he likes or something that he likes *a lot*. When she says that he has to think of something he likes *a lot*, he has trouble answering. While thinking, his mind wanders to the nuns he met that morning. It also wanders to James Castle, an Elkton Hills student who committed suicide while Holden was also a student there. Holden didn't know Castle very well, but he remembers him because Castle jumped out a window after a group of boys tried to get him to take back something he said about one of them. Unwilling to take back his insult, Castle flung himself out the window and died.

Holden thinks back to James Castle because Castle is unnervingly similar to him. After all, Holden is the kind of person who refuses to stop calling people "morons" even when they're threatening to beat him up. He's also the kind of person who fantasizes frequently about death and suicide. As such, Holden sees Castle as a tragic but oddly heroic version of himself, somebody who actually followed through with what Holden has thus far only thought about. As he thinks about this, though, he ultimately fails to answer Phoebe's question, proving that she's right to point out his unrelenting cynicism.

Finally, Holden says that he likes Allie and talking to Phoebe. Phoebe, for her part, says this doesn't count because Allie is dead, but Holden says this shouldn't matter, since Allie was nicer than anyone he's ever met. Changing the nature of the question, Phoebe tells Holden to think of something he'd like to be, such as a scientist or a lawyer. Right away, Holden says he could never be a scientist because he's horrible at science, and though he admits that being a lawyer wouldn't be so bad, he struggles with whether or not lawyers advocate for innocent people because they want to help them or because they simply want to be good lawyers. Because of this misgiving, he has trouble picturing himself as a lawyer, wondering how he would know if he's being a "phony."

The only two things Holden can confidently say he likes are Phoebe and Allie, both of whom he has idealized in his mind. It's as if he has decided that they're the only good parts of his life and has now refused to admit that anything else could ever bring him happiness. Then, when Phoebe suggests that Holden might like becoming a scientist or a lawyer, he immediately rejects this notion, fearing that he wouldn't be able to continue identifying what's "phony" and what isn't. Ironically, this constant focus on "phoniness" is exactly what makes it impossible for him to like anything in the first place.

Still trying to answer Phoebe's question, Holden mentions the song he heard a little boy singing on the street earlier that day. He outlines the lyrics, singing, "**If a body catch a body comin' through the rye**." Before he can finish his point, Phoebe interjects to tell him that the lyric is actually, "If a body *meet* a body coming through the rye." Admitting that she's right, Holden says he keeps envisioning a field of rye with a large group of children running around in it. In this image, there is a cliff of some sort. Holden is standing on the edge and must catch the children before they accidentally run off and fall. Having explained this, he says that all he really wants to be is "the catcher in the rye."

Holden's fantasy about becoming "the catcher in the rye" is rather abstract and surreal, but it spotlights his desire to preserve what little innocence he believes is left in the world. To him, children represent the purity of youth, but he recognizes that this purity inevitably recedes as they grow older. For this reason, he wants to protect this purity from corruption, and wishes he could spend all of his time keeping the hardships of the adult world at bay. In and of itself, this is a rather innocent and naïve thing to want, and this naivety becomes even more pronounced when readers consider the song Holden is quoting. Indeed, "Comin' Thro' the Rye" is an old poem set to a folk melody that has extremely sexually explicit implications—implications that Holden completely misunderstands. When he quotes it, then, he not only exhibits his attachment to innocence, but inadvertently demonstrates that he himself is still quite innocent and immature when it comes to adult matters.

After listening to Holden talk about becoming **the catcher in the rye**, Phoebe once again reminds him that their father is going to be furious with him. Nevertheless, Holden says he doesn't care what his parents think. With this, he decides to call his former English teacher at Elkton Hills, Mr. Antolini. Telling Phoebe to stay awake, he goes to the living room and picks up the phone.

When Phoebe corrects Holden by reminding him of the real lyrics of "Comin' Thro' the Rye," she takes him out of his fantasy. As he comes crashing back to the real world, then, he looks for a new escape by calling Mr. Antolini.

CHAPTER 23

Holden calls Mr. Antolini, who tells him he can come over right away if he wants, though he's upset to hear that Holden has been kicked out of Pencey. After hanging up, Holden reflects upon the fact that Mr. Antolini is the best teacher he's ever had and is the kind of adult who can joke around but also maintain a sense of authority. In fact, it was Mr. Antolini who picked James Castle off the ground when the boy jumped out of the window. For this reason, Holden respects him.

Holden thinks highly of Mr. Antolini because Mr. Antolini doesn't conform to the same stereotype as most teachers. Instead of existing as a disciplinarian figure in Holden's life, Mr. Antolini is at once personable and respectable, a blend of characteristics that appeals to Holden, who badly needs somebody he likes to help guide him through this stage of his life, since he has trouble finding role models in people he thinks are "phony."

Back in Phoebe's room, Holden convinces his little sister to dance with him. Since he thinks Phoebe is one of the best dancers he's ever met, he's happy when she agrees to do several numbers with him. When they stop, Holden lights a cigarette and turns off the radio—a smart choice, since he then hears his parents entering the apartment. Stubbing out his cigarette, he turns off the lights and hides in the closet before his mother enters and scolds Phoebe, saying that she saw the light go off. She also smells the cigarette smoke, and Phoebe says that she took just one puff. This displeases her mother, but she doesn't punish Phoebe, instead telling her to go to sleep.

Phoebe's loyalty to Holden comes to the forefront of the novel when she takes the blame for smoking. This illustrates that they have a strong mutual affection for one another. More importantly, Phoebe is perhaps the only person who would be willing to sacrifice herself for Holden, since she is also *the only person he has never wronged or purposefully estranged himself from.*

When his mother leaves the room, Holden creeps out of the closet and prepares to leave. Because he's running low on money, though, he's forced to borrow from Phoebe. He feels guilty for taking the money she has saved to buy Christmas presents, but he has no other choice, and Phoebe is happy to lend it to him. Before leaving, he promises to come see her play on Friday, saying that he'll pay her back at that point. In response, she hands him the entirety of her savings, despite his insistence that he only needs a couple of dollars. Overwhelmed by emotion, Holden begins to cry, which startles Phoebe. When she tells him that he can spend the night with her in D.B.'s room if it'd make him feel better, he thanks her but says he has to leave, taking off his **hunting hat** and giving it to her.

Phoebe doesn't know what to make of Holden's sudden display of intense emotion, but she also doesn't judge him for breaking down. To the contrary, she supports him and makes him feel as if it's all right to be sad. To show her how much he appreciates this emotional support, then, he gives her his hunting hat, a symbolic act that represents his willingness to make sacrifices for his beloved little sister. Given that the hat is an ongoing symbol of Holden's alienation from others, this gesture also indicates that he considers Phoebe to be a friend and confidant, and that he feels he can be his true self around her instead of putting on a contrived persona. This, it's worth mentioning, is one of the few selfless things Holden does throughout the entire novel.

CHAPTER 24

When Holden arrives at Mr. Antolini's apartment, he sees that Mr. Antolini and his wife have just had a party. The apartment is full of glasses and dishes, and Mr. Antolini is still drinking highballs of liquor while Mrs. Antolini makes coffee in the kitchen. Holden has a good relationship with Mr. Antolini, who often comes to his parents' house for dinner and belongs to the same tennis club as his family. Once Holden and Mr. Antolini get settled in the living room, Mr. Antolini says, "So. You and Pencey are no longer one." The way he puts this annoys Holden, who sometimes thinks that Mr. Antolini tries too hard to sound interesting.

Even Mr. Antolini, whom Holden respects and thinks is a good teacher, can't escape Holden's judgment. Holden's annoyance at his teacher's phrasing reminds readers of his tendency to estrange himself from people, even when they only want to help him.

Mr. Antolini questions Holden about his expulsion, saying that he hopes he didn't fail English. Holden assures him that English is the only class he passed, but he goes on at length about a course called Oral Expression. In this class, each student was required to stand up and deliver a speech. If the speaker got off topic, Holden explains, his classmates had to yell "Digression!" at him. Holden tells Mr. Antolini that he hated this, saying that he actually likes it when people digress. Playing devil's advocate, Mr. Antolini asks him if he really enjoys it when he's talking to somebody who gets off topic, but Holden suddenly doesn't feel like having this conversation. As he sits in the living room, he realizes that he feels physically terrible.

It's helpful to remember at this point that Holden has spent the majority of the night drinking scotch. Consequently, he's suffering the effects of over-consuming alcohol as he tries to have a serious conversation with Mr. Antolini. Holden uses his unsteady physical state to justify why he doesn't want to have this conversation with Mr. Antolini. In reality, though, Holden most likely doesn't want to have this discussion because it's about his performance in school, which is a source of shame for him. To make matters worse, Mr. Antolini—whom Holden respects—seems to be gearing up to give him the same kind of lecture that Dr. Thurmer and Mr. Spencer have already given him. If this is the case, then Holden will undoubtedly feel like he can't find anyone who will understand him—after all, even Phoebe was angry when she learned that he failed out of Pencey.

Mr. Antolini tells Holden that he had lunch with his father recently. This apparently took place shortly before Holden's parents went to Pencey to have a frank discussion with Dr. Thurmer about his academic standing. Mr. Antolini says that Holden's father is very worried about him, but Holden doesn't have the energy to engage in this conversation. Still, Mr. Antolini goes on, saying that he thinks Holden's heading for a "terrible fall" that will result in a life of bitterness. Holden protests, but Mr. Antolini continues: the "fall" Holden is destined for, according to Antolini, happens when a man expects more from his environment than it can possibly offer him. When this happens, he claims, many people simply stop trying to find contentment, giving up hope without putting in a real effort to lead good lives.

Although Mr. Antolini seems about to deliver the same kind of lecture that Holden has already received from Mr. Spencer and Dr. Thurmer, his words are more effective because he 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 this way. Instead of emphasizing how important it is to follow the rules in the game of life, then, he tries to show the effects that Holden's unrelenting cynicism might have on his long-term happiness. If, he says, Holden never puts any effort into his life because he sees it as pointless, he will most likely give up hope of ever manifesting a pleasant existence for himself.

Mr. Antolini elaborates on his ideas, telling Holden that he can envision him dying "nobly" for some pointless cause. He then quotes a psychoanalyst named Wilhelm Stekel, saying, "The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one." He writes this down and hands it to Holden, who promises to keep it (he notes as an aside that he does indeed still have it). Holden thanks him for this and puts it in his pocket, but he feels too tired to fully focus on what Mr. Antolini has told him.

The quote Mr. Antolini writes down for Holden emphasizes the young man's obsession with authenticity. Although Mr. Antolini understands that Holden is right to recognize that many people are shallow and dishonest, he tries to get him to see that he has fixated too much on this cynical worldview. To that end, he suggests that Holden will cut himself off from enjoyment in life because he's too willing to "die nobly" for the unworthy cause of exposing "phonies." Instead of focusing on this, Mr. Antolini implies, Holden should find a way to accept the things that upset him and move on.

Unlike Holden, Mr. Antolini shows no signs of being tired. Continuing his lecture, he says he suspects that Holden will soon realize that he has to apply himself in school. This, he argues, is because Holden is a natural student, someone who inherently treasures knowledge. Once Holden gets over the trivial annoyances of going to school, Mr. Antolini says, he'll realize that he's not the first young person to be fed up with the way other humans behave. In fact, many people have been just as disillusioned as Holden. He points out that Holden can learn from the people who have written about this process of maturing, adding that perhaps one day people will learn from *his* story, too. As Mr. Antolini says this, though, all Holden notices is that his former teacher is a bit drunk—that, and how badly he himself wants to go to sleep.

It's unclear how much of what Mr. Antolini says Holden takes to heart. Regardless, though, it's undeniable that Mr. Antolini has expressed these ideas more effectively than Mr. Spencer, who simply made Holden feel bad about failing out of school. Instead of shaming Holden, Mr. Antolini suggests that he's a very smart young man, thereby encouraging him to independently pursue knowledge, which he thinks would help him grapple with some of the misgivings he has about society. Holden has always seen school as something that requires him to give up his unique viewpoint, but Mr. Antolini now suggests that Holden can use education to further define himself and, in doing so, facilitate his personal growth.

As Mr. Antolini holds forth with his advice, Holden accidentally yawns. He immediately feels rude for doing this, but Mr. Antolini simply laughs and tells him to get some sleep, helping him turn the couch into a makeshift bed. Before long, Holden is asleep, but he wakes up a short time later and feels Mr. Antolini's hand brushing his forehead. Startled, he jumps up, but Mr. Antolini claims that he was only "admiring" him. Nevertheless, Holden suspects his former teacher of "being perverty" toward him, so he declares that he has to leave, saying that he left his suitcases in a locker at Grand Central Station and must go collect them. As he scrambles to get dressed, Mr. Antolini tries to convince him to stay, and when Holden refuses, Mr. Antolini calls him strange. Undeterred, Holden thanks Mr. Antolini for his advice and leaves.

Regardless of Mr. Antolini's intentions, it's obvious that his actions are inappropriate, since an adult in his position shouldn't be showing any kind of physical affection to a former student, especially if that student is asleep in the adult's house. If Mr. Antolini's affection toward Holden truly is sexual, this is quite tragic, because he is—until this point—one of the only people who encourages Holden to feel more or less at ease with himself. When this relationship suddenly takes on inappropriate overtones, though, Holden is forced to second-guess the nature of their bond. To protect himself, he alienates himself from Antolini, once again finding himself estranged from everyone around him.

CHAPTER 25

In Grand Central Station, Holden sleeps on a bench in a waiting area. Having never felt more depressed in his life, he eventually finds it impossible to sleep when people begin to populate the building during the morning commute hours. In retrospect, he wonders if Mr. Antolini was actually acting inappropriately toward him, or if he perhaps overreacted. Maybe, he thinks, Mr. Antolini simply likes to "pat guys on the head when they're asleep." Thinking this way, he regrets reacting so harshly to what happened at Mr. Antolini's apartment, and he begins to feel even more depressed than he already did.

Salinger never clarifies what, exactly, Mr. Antolini's intentions were when he stroked Holden's head. However, it hardly matters whether or not this contact was of a sexual nature, since the end result still rattled Holden to his core and forced him to question whether or not he could trust Antolini, who was up until that point one of the few people he could turn to in times of hardship. Alone and confused, Holden now tortures himself by second-guessing his very reasonable reaction, blaming himself for running away from one of the only people who seems to truly care about him.

As Holden exits Grand Central Station, he begins to feel sick, realizing that he has a cold coming on. To make matters worse, his stomach feels terrible, so he goes into a donut shop but finds himself unable to eat. He then begins to walk down Fifth Avenue, remembering how he took Phoebe Christmas shopping there two years ago. This is a fond memory, but it doesn't help put Holden in a better mood. Instead, he's overcome by a strange but sudden fear that each time he steps off the curb he'll never get to the other side of the road. At the end of every block, he becomes convinced that he's going to descend forever into the street, so he begs Allie to protect him.

Although Holden's fear about never reaching the other side of the street seems quite strange and even a bit unhinged, it actually makes sense when one considers the fact that he has just spent the night thinking about the future. Indeed, the rest of his life is uncertain and difficult to predict, and he has no sense of whether or not he'll make it through the various hardships that adulthood has already begun to throw at him. In keeping with this, whether or not he'll make it to the other side of the street becomes a metaphor for his overall uncertainty regarding the future.

Holden decides that the only thing for him to do is leave New York City once and for all. Wanting to say goodbye to Phoebe, he goes to her school and gives an administrator in the principal's office a note telling her to meet him at the Museum of Art during her lunchbreak because he's going to move out West once and for all. While he's at the school, which he too used to attend, he begins to feel excited by his plan to head West. However, his spirits sink when he looks up and sees that someone has scrawled "Fuck you" on one of the building's walls. Enraged that somebody would write this where kids like Phoebe can see it, Holden erases the phrase and fantasizes about killing whomever wrote it.

The scrawled curse words enrage Holden because he can't stand the idea of somebody purposefully corrupting children. Of course, his rage is most likely also linked to his experience at Mr. Antolini's the night before, since Mr. Antolini's inappropriate touch threatened to corrupt his own youthful sense of innocence. At the same time, though, it's rather ironic that he reacts so negatively to the words written on the wall, since he has been using coarse language throughout the entire novel. Once again, then, readers see that he doesn't necessarily hold himself to the same standards to which he holds everyone else.

After delivering the note for Phoebe, Holden exits the school by using a different staircase. On his way out, he notices yet another "Fuck you," and this time he's unable to rub it off the wall. This, he says, is the problem with the world: no matter what people do, they'll never be able to erase all the obscene messages.

Despite Mr. Antolini's advice to stop seeing the world so cynically, Holden finds himself depressed by humanity, believing that it's pointless to have any faith in the goodness of other people. This, of course, is most likely because Mr. Antolini effectively nullified his own words by muddying his relationship with Holden, acting inappropriately and ultimately unsettling any sense of connection between him and Holden. As a result, Holden can't quite accept his advice, which is why he finds himself so dispirited when he sees another "Fuck you."

Holden sets out for the Museum of Art. On his way, he considers calling Jane Gallagher, but ultimately doesn't feel up to the task. Once he reaches the museum, he encounters two young boys who ask him where the mummies are. Happy to show them, Holden jokes around with the boys by asking them to tell him what a mummy is, and then he leads them to the Egyptian section. On the way, he asks if they know how the Egyptians buried their dead, explaining that they used to wrap the dead people in cloth soaked in secret preservatives. As soon as he and the boys enter the dark hall with the Pharaoh's tomb, though, the boys get scared and run away. Holden, on the other hand, finds the space peaceful until he sees yet another "Fuck you" written just beneath a glass display.

That Holden teaches the young boys about how the Ancient Egyptians preserved their dead is rather ironic, since he showed no interest in talking or learning about the Ancient Egyptians when he was in Mr. Spencer's class. Despite his apathy regarding this subject, though, he apparently absorbed some of the information. And though what he tells the boys is a very simplified version of how the Ancient Egyptians mummified their dead, it demonstrates once again that his failure in school had nothing to do with his learning capabilities. It also confirms that Mr. Antolini was right to encourage him to embrace his own intelligence. Furthermore, it makes sense that Holden would have retained information about how to embalm dead people, since this act of preservation no doubt appeals to his desire to keep change at bay. Before he can dwell on this thought, though, he once again plunges into cynicism when he sees "Fuck you" written beneath one of the displays.

Upset, Holden goes to the bathroom in the museum, feeling suddenly ill. After he uses the toilet, he passes out on his way to wash his hands at the sink, though he wakes up shortly thereafter and is thankful that he didn't hit his head on the floor. Exiting the bathroom, he waits for Phoebe and imagines his life out West, thinking that he'll only let people visit him in his cabin if they promise not to be "phony."

Holden's physical state is in rapid decline, ultimately mirroring his mental health. At this point in the novel, it's helpful to remember that Holden is only 16 and has been on his own in the city for several days. He has been eating very little, drinking a lot, and hardly sleeping—all signs that he's not ready to launch himself into the adult world, though this is exactly what he has done.

Although she's late, Phoebe finally arrives lugging a large suitcase. When Holden tells her he doesn't need anything from home, she informs him that the suitcase is for her, since she has decided to come with him. He says that he won't let her come, and suddenly the very prospect of arguing makes him feel faint again. He even begins to resent Phoebe, especially because he hates the idea that she would willingly miss her play in order to accompany him. Phoebe, for her part, becomes angry at him for not letting her join him. Frustrated, she takes off his **hunting hat**, which she has been wearing, and thrusts it into his arms.

Holden resents Phoebe in this moment because he suddenly realizes that she's willing to do whatever he says, even if it's against her best interest. This troubles him because it forces him to realize that he's the one who should be responsible. Until this conversation, Phoebe has been the voice of reason in their relationship. Now, though, Holden has to assume responsibility because he can plainly see that coming with him out West will be bad for Phoebe. Consequently, he dislikes her for forcing him into the kind of adult role he's been trying to avoid for so long.

Holden grabs Phoebe's suitcase and leaves it at the coat-check in the museum. He then tries to walk her back to school, but she refuses to return, telling him to shut up when he tries to convince her. This shocks Holden, who hates hearing Phoebe use such harsh words. To make her feel better, he offers to take her to the zoo, but she refuses to walk with him, instead running across the street. Instead of chasing her, Holden simply starts walking toward the zoo, knowing that his sister will follow him from a distance. Sure enough, he leads her toward the park and into the zoo.

Finally, Holden begins to act responsibly. By reasoning with his sister because he doesn't want her to do anything rash, he's forced to behave maturely. In this capacity, he acts like an adult by leading Phoebe to the park so that she'll be safe and won't ruin her life like he thinks he has ruined his own.

After meandering silently through the zoo, Holden and Phoebe start to walk toward a large carousel where Holden, Allie, and D.B. used to take Phoebe when she was little. Phoebe still isn't talking to Holden, but he can tell she isn't as mad at him as she was before. When they reach the carousel, he buys her a ticket and convinces her to take a ride. As he watches, he notices that the carousel still plays the same song it played when *he* was a kid. He also worries that Phoebe might fall off her horse because she keeps straining to grab the gold ring hanging from the carousel's ceiling. Despite his worry, though, he doesn't tell her to be careful, knowing that it's better to let kids fall than to interfere with them.

Holden's sense that it's better to let kids fall than to interfere stands in direct opposition to his former desire to be the "catcher in the rye" who protects children and preserves their innocence, suggesting that he has come to realize his own naïveté in thinking that he could stave off adulthood. It also suggests that he has developed a cynical attitude toward advice, which several adult characters have tried to give him throughout the novel. Although Holden badly needs guidance, he largely resents the people who tell him what he's doing wrong in life. The only person whose advice resonates with him is Mr. Antolini, who frames his ideas not in terms of everything Holden has done badly, but in terms of how he might rethink some of the hard-headed convictions that are holding him back from happiness. Unfortunately, though, Mr. Antolini's advice has also soured as a result of his odd behavior toward Holden. Accordingly, Holden thinks that all advice is nothing but an annoyance, and that people should learn by making their own mistakes. Interestingly enough, this is a fairly reasonable mentality to adopt, especially since it's one of the only thoughts that Holden has about how to move through life while acknowledging that he won't be able to avoid the occasional downfall.

When Phoebe finishes riding the carousel, Holden encourages her to take another ride. Before she does, though, she takes **the hunting hat** (which Holden put in his pocket) and places it on her brother's head. She then asks him if he's really going to move out West, and he assures her that he isn't, promising to go home after they're finished in the park. Happy with this news, she runs back to the carousel. As Holden watches her, he feels so happy he could cry.

By convincing Phoebe not to go out West, Holden fulfills his desire to protect childhood innocence. In doing so, he decides against going West, thereby saving not just Phoebe, but himself, too. In this way, he becomes "the catcher in the rye" who saves children from ruin. However, this doesn't mean that he doesn't still face a fair amount of emotional turmoil, as evidenced by the intense joy he feels while watching the pure and innocent image of Phoebe on the carousel. As he watches her and feels so happy that he could cry, he uses his newfound contentment to shield himself from his depression and the looming hardships of adulthood, both of which he will need to address at some point.

CHAPTER 26

Holden concludes by refusing to say what happened after he and Phoebe went to the carousel in the park. The only information he offers beyond this is that he got sick shortly thereafter and is supposed to start school again once he "get[s] out of here." He mentions that a psychoanalyst who works where he's currently staying continues to ask him if he's going to apply himself when he goes to his new school in the fall. However, Holden thinks this is a stupid question because, although he *thinks* he's going to apply himself, he won't actually know if this is true until he's at school again.

The end of The Catcher in the Rye *doesn't provide any insight into what becomes of Holden, except that he seems to have been put in some kind of monitored facility where he can be psychoanalyzed. Preserving this sense of ambiguity, Holden says that he doesn't know whether or not he'll apply himself when he returns to school, ultimately implying that he may not have learned much from what happened to him in the aftermath of his expulsion from Pencey. By not letting the novel conclude with a clear moral, Salinger invites readers to think of Holden as a real person with real problems that can't simply be solved with simple resolutions. Indeed, Holden will continue to struggle through life, whether or not he decides to apply himself in school. This much, at least, seems clear.*

D.B. visits Holden quite frequently. He recently asked how Holden feels about everything that has happened to him in the past few months, but Holden didn't know what to say. After all, he's not entirely sure what he thinks of the entire ordeal. The only thing he *is* sure about is that he wishes he hadn't told so many people about what happened to him once he left Pencey. Oddly enough, he finds himself missing the people in the story he's just told—even Ackley and Stradlater. This, Holden says, is why people shouldn't talk so much about their lives, because "if you do, you start missing everybody."

It shouldn't be all that surprising that Holden suddenly finds himself missing people he previously disliked. After all, this pattern has followed him throughout the novel, as he vacillates between wanting human interaction and alienating the very people he seeks out. That he doesn't like talking about his life also suggests that he probably dislikes the psychoanalysis he's receiving, which undoubtedly requires him to express himself and talk about his emotions. Given that he's so used to evading his feelings by focusing on things like whether or not people are "phony," it makes sense that he would feel uncomfortable speaking so directly about his own experience as he moves through life.

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