

J.D. Salinger
CATCHER IN THE RYE

Mr. Antolini

Mr. Antolini is the adult who comes closest to reaching Holden. He manages to avoid alienating Holden, and being described a “phony,” because he doesn’t behave conventionally. He doesn’t speak to Holden in the persona of a teacher or authority figure, as Mr. Spencer does. He doesn’t object to Holden’s calling him in the middle of the night or to Holden’s being drunk or smoking. By opening his door to Holden, he shows no reservations about exposing his private self, with his messy apartment, his older wife with her hair in curlers, and his own heavy drinking.

Mr. Antolini’s advice to Holden about why he should apply himself to his studies is also unconventional. He recognizes that Holden is different from other students, and he validates Holden’s suffering and confusion by suggesting that one day they may be worth writing about. He represents education not as a path of conformity but as a means for Holden to develop his unique voice and to find the ideas that are most appropriate to him.

Holden regrets his hasty judgment of Mr. Antolini, but this mistake is very important to him, because he finally starts to question his own practice of making snap judgments about people. Holden realizes that even if Mr. Antolini is gay, he can’t simply be dismissed as a “flit,” since he has also been kind and generous. Holden begins to acknowledge that Mr. Antolini is complex and that he has feelings.