

# Jerome David Salinger

Jerome David Salinger was born in Manhattan, New York, on New Year's Day, 1919. He was an American author, best known for his novel *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger began writing short stories while in secondary school. His last original published work was in 1965 and he gave his last interview in 1980.

The young Salinger attended public schools on the West Side of Manhattan. Then the family moved to Park Avenue and Salinger went to the McBurney School, a private school in Manhattan. Salinger was not a good student, he had failing grades, and therefore was kicked out. Then he went to the Valley Forge Military Academy, where he graduated in 1936. At this school he began writing stories and he was the literary editor of the class yearbook. During the Second World War, Salinger arranged to meet with Ernest Hemingway, a writer who had influenced him. Salinger was impressed with Hemingway's friendliness and modesty. In June 1955, at the age of 36, Salinger married Claire Douglas. They had two children, Margaret and Matthew. Salinger died of natural causes at his home in New Hampshire, United States on January 27, 2010. He was 91. His main creations were books: *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), *Nine Stories* (1953), *Franny and Zooey* (1961) and a few more stories *Go See Eddie*, *A Boy in France*, *This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise*, *A Girl I Knew*, *I'm Crazy*, *Blue Melody*.

*The Catcher in the Rye* is a 1951 novel by J. D. Salinger. Originally published for adults, it has since become popular with adolescent readers for its themes of teenage confusion, angst, alienation, language, and rebellion. It has been translated into almost all of the world's major languages. The novel's protagonist and antihero, Holden Caulfield, has become an icon for teenage rebellion. The *New York Times* readers announced the book as one of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th century.

In 1960 a teacher was fired for assigning the novel in class; he was later reinstated. Between 1961 and 1982, *The Catcher in the Rye* was the most censored book in high schools and libraries in the United States. In 1981 it was both the most censored book and the second most taught book in public schools in the United States.

## Writing style

*The Catcher in the Rye* is written in a **subjective style** from the point of view of its protagonist, Holden Caulfield, following his exact thought processes. Critical reviews agree that the novel accurately **reflected the teenage colloquial speech of the time**. Words and phrases that frequently appear include:  
- **phoney** (that means superficial, hypocritical, pretentious & fake)

- **“That killed me.”** (that means I found that hilarious or astonishing)
- **flit and flitty** (homosexual , homosexual behaviour)
- **wuddya** (the slang, would you)
- **crumby** (insufficient, disappointing )

Holden`s jargon is consistent and very enlightening. For example, Holden`s use of qualifiers such as: “If you want to know the truth,” “I know what I am talking about ,” or “I am not kidding” serve to emphasize **how unsure Holden is of what he`s saying** or how well he will be received. Holden also has a tendency to use the undefined second-person pronoun, “you.” This ungrammatical usage emphasizes the disillusionment Holden feels because **almost no one sees the world like he does**-he constantly has to reassure himself that others would do the same thing or feel the same way.

Holden`s **criticism of society** is brutally honest: his profanity is atrocious, and he levels his knife against everything from religion to homosexuality without flinching. This is, after all, an adolescent`s mind. Similarly, we also note the psychological exactness with which Salinger details Holden`s thoughts, which reflect the **symptoms of depression** as well as the common biases which plague human nature.

Finally, Salinger knows when to break the heaviness of his subject matter with humour. For example, take Holden`s conversation with the cabbie Horwitz about how ducks stay alive in the winter. Sometimes there is a fine **line between seriousness and humour**, and Salinger dances deftly between the two.

## Important quotes

- “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.” (page 119) → Here we can see that Holden really **likes children**, because they are still **pure and innocence**.
- “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 am 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 are running and they don`t look where they`re going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That`s all that I`d do all day. **I`d just be the catcher in the rye and all.** I know that it`s crazy, but that`s the only thing I`d really like to be. I know it`s crazy.” (page 173) → Holden would like **to keep the children from this cruel reality and from adulthood**, because when you become an adult, you also become a phoney.
- Mr. Antolini to Holden: “ 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.” (page 188) → Mr. Antolini gives advice about Holden`s future - he should listen his voice and ambitions. Mr Antolini is Holden`s favourite teacher, because **he is not phoney**.

# CHARACTER ANALYSIS

## HOLDEN CAULFIELD(narrator and protagonist)

Holden is tall and skinny teenager, he has a head full of gray hair. He is also a heavy smoker. Holden is the son of a wealthy New York family. He has just been expelled from Pencey Prep School, which is not the only school he was expelled from.

His main characteristic is that he hates and judges everybody, but at the same time he wants them to join him for a drink or to chat with him. In his mind, everybody is phony (social-climber, a name-dropper, appearance-obsessed, a secret slob, a private flit, or a suck-up). Holden considers any semblance of normal adult life to be "phony." Basically, if Holden calls everyone phony, he can feel better when they reject him. Despite his judgmental exterior, Holden is surprisingly eager to please and to make friends. He seems very uncertain in what he wants in his life. His passivity and indecision take over at key moments. Although he displays a number of typical teenage characteristics, in the text are some definite hints that Holden is not normal teenager. We know he is prone to violent outbreaks, screaming and he is also depressed all the time.

## PHOEBE CAULFIELD:

Holden's 10-year-old sister is his most trusted link to his family. Holden assures to the readers that she is the smartest kid ever, and also emotional and funny. She is a pretty amazing character because she somehow manages to be all over the above, but still very much ten years old. Holden appreciates every minute detail of Phoebe's existence. In Holden's eyes she is exactly the sort of child he wants to protect by being the catcher in the rye. Phoebe realizes the extent of her brother's misanthropy and unhappiness, and she simply wants to be there for him. In the end, it is her willingness to go to the end of the earth with him that wakes Holden up to the impossibility of his self-destructive impulses.

## ALLIE CAUFIELD:

Allie is Holden's 2 years younger brother that died from leukemia when he was 11. His death had a huge impact on Holden's life. In fact, the night of his death, Holden broke all the windows and had to be hospitalized. He was definitely a unique individual (left handed, red haired), but Holden idealizes him as the most intelligent, the nicest, the sweetest, most endearing kid with the best sense of humor. In Holden's love for his brother and in his pain over Allie's death, Holden has glorified Allie into something of a saint. Holden often turns to his brother when times are worst.

D.B CAULFIELD:

Holden's older brother, who is a screenwriter in Hollywood. As Holden thinks, he used to be a great writer till he became a prostitute for Hollywood, by selling his soul to it. Holden's favourite story is The Secret Goldfish. D.B. used to be in the Army. Holden reveals that D.B.'s experience in war had quite a traumatizing effect on his brother. When he would come home on leave, Holden says, he used to lie on his bed the whole time and stare at the ceiling

## Themes

In the book there are different themes, such as religion, knowledge, lack of authority figures, painful experiences, madness, sadness, isolation, empathy. But the major themes are innocence, life, death, sexuality and these are the themes I am going to present.

### INNOCENCE

The sad truth Holden realizes is that maturity entails a loss of innocence. Holden is an adolescent obsessed with saving children (innocent souls) from dirtiness he sees in the adult world, which includes sex in any form, that is why he feels the need to isolate children from it, instead of easing into it as a natural step to becoming an adult. But on the other hand, he cannot bear his innocence because innocence brings its own harms- people continue to disappoint him. For example he cannot bear to accept the death of Allie (Allie is the truth, while everyone else is phony), the death of pure innocence that had no reason to suffer or to die.

### LIFE AND DEATH

In the book it is obvious what a traumatic effect from first-hand experiences with death can have on an individual. Holden lost his younger brother when he was only 13, and he also witnessed a young boy's suicide. These events left Holden plagued with nearly constant thoughts of death and mortality. Holden often focuses on death and disappearance to avoid interacting with the real and living world around him.

### SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL IDENTITY

His problem is that he cannot find a balance between respecting a woman (and her saying »no«) and taking sexual control of a situation- when the woman wants him to. To Holden, sex is deeply discomforting. In the book sexual molestation is indicated. The book also examines the way in which such events affect young adults (in this case Holden and Jane) as they try to understand their own sexuality. Numbing himself to love seems to be Holden's greatest challenge. For example, even in the presence of a prostitute he cannot think of having sex. Only

having a conversation in the hope of feeling some glimmer of human affection with her.