

## Character Analysis

The *Catcher in the Rye* is narrated by the mentally-unstable, 17-year-old, PTSD patient- Holden Caulfield. Holden's pessimism and narrow-mindedness is embraced by his frequent resort to hyperbole "you were supposed to commit suicide if they didn't win or something" (to exaggerate the event so that it delivers the same impact on the readers as the true incident had on the overly-emotional and immatured Holden), repetition "they can drive you crazy. They really can" and generalisation "guys that always talk about how many miles...guys that get sore and childish...guys that are very mean", (to present these horrendous instances as common adult attitude) to convince the readers of *his* story. However, these underdeveloped tactics, coupled with the repetition of the phrase "im mad", "I'm the most terrific liar", contradiction between what he says and does (claims he isn't screaming but has earlier mentioned that he screams when he's excited), habitual use of sarcasm and irony, use of verbal tics such as "I mean", "I think", "I guess so" and the use of frame story exposes his dishonesty. Throughout the narrative, Holden criticises phoniness, but then, proceeds to ceaselessly use 1950s slangs such as "swell", "sonuvabitch", gets involved in activities meant *for his age* (hires a prostitute though it makes him extremely uncomfortable) *and* instantly acts phony when the circumstances require him to do so. His constant shameful need for peer validation and acceptance sheds light on his low self-esteem and loneliness. When Holden actually believed that he had got cancer and would certainly die just by reading a random magazine, readers infer that he has become neurotic. Additionally, his fear of being "swallowed by every road turn" indicates that he has also become psychotic. His uncontrollable habit of lying (to Mrs. Morrow), desperate need to talk to people (need to talk to a prostitute), impulsiveness, manipulative abilities (convinced a guy who didn't need a typewriter to buy one for himself) and insecurity regarding relations (fear to form bonds in case they leave him the way Jane and Allie did) leads readers to conclude that the narrative is being recounted by a 17-year-old Holden Caulfield, suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder and Avoidant Personality Disorder.

## Recommendation and Review

An eye opener to moulded flesh; a directory for young flesh; a shoulder to transitory yet resistant bleeding flesh- the *Catcher in the Rye* is a partly autobiographical account written by Jerome David Salinger during World War 2. It is narrated in first-person by a mentally-unstable, hospitalised, 17-year-old Holden Caulfield as he recounts two days of his life in the dirty waters of New York's 'phony' adult crowd after impulsively dropping out of Pencey Prep. The novel falls under the genre of psychological realism, bildungsroman, self-discovery and coming-of-age narrative and embodies each genre's beauty to its fullest by inviting all age groups to an honest window of current social behaviours.

Navigating through our 1950s teen's tangled thoughts and shocking decisions is mind racking, as readers are compelled to psychoanalyse Holden to detangle him. His need to remember Jane as someone who kept her chess kings in the back row, need to assume that a fault in one adult is present in all, extreme criticism of phoniness, contradicting actions, sudden bursts of violent energy followed by indolence, psychotic and neurotic behaviour, need to jump to the conclusion that everyone has negative intentions, obstinate belief in his deluded ideas, impulsive thoughts, desperation to fit in, refusal to submit to change and other behavioral traits makes him the perfect subject for psychoanalysis. The clever use of striking structural choices such as a picaresque narrative and frame story further strengthens these findings and blurs the lines between reality and imagination. What's more interesting is that our 'protagonist', Holden, could be lying and twisting the

truth to suit his distorted outlook of the world, essentially implying that the book is a lie. Even though self-discovery isn't a prominent genre as Holden doesn't undergo the complete process of self-realisation like Piscine Molitor Patel, he does realise his flaws (let's Phoebe be free for the first time instead of shielding her from 'adulthood') indicating the hopeful start towards growth and eventual maturation.

#### Timeline of Production

Written in the 1950s by an army officer suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder and Avoidant personality Disorder, the narrative is a story of the war, the 1950s, the trend of conformity. But at its core, it is about Jerome David Salinger, as he works towards putting his turbulent mind into words through the voice of *Holden Caulfield*. Having fought in WW2, Salinger was diagnosed with PTSD and so is Holden. The story then begins, except in the voice of a PTSD patient. Throughout the narrative, Holden's pessimism towards 'adults' are an imitation of Salinger's distaste towards adults who waged war and left children to put the broken pieces back together. Unfortunately, this was followed by a global period of conformity, and having already tasted the bitter medicine of conformity in his adolescent years (Salinger had trouble fitting at Valley Forge school - Pencey Prep may have been based on this), Salinger, or rather Holden, vented out his disgust and bitterness. In the end, *The Catcher in the Rye* was Salinger's escape, but also his prison, allowing him to unleash but also stay true or loyal to his pitiable self.