

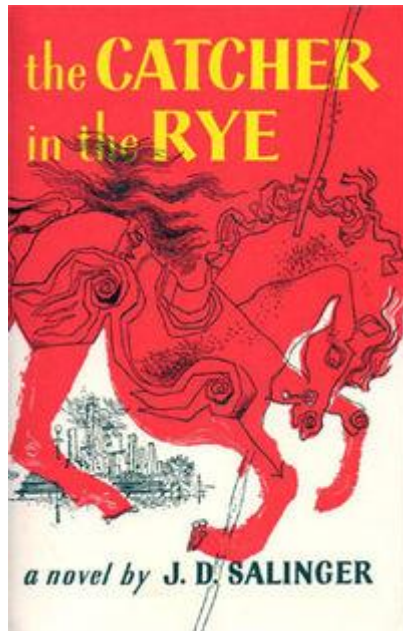
The Catcher in the Rye

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"Catcher in the Rye" redirects here. For the song, see [Chinese Democracy](#).

The Catcher in the Rye



First edition cover

Author(s)	J. D. Salinger
Cover artist	E. Michael Mitchell ^{[1][2]}
Country	United States
Language	English
Genre(s)	Novel
Publisher	Little, Brown and Company
Publication date	16 July 1951
Media type	Print (Hardback & Paperback)
Pages	214 pp
ISBN	0-316-76953-3
OCLC Number	287628

The Catcher in the Rye is a 1951 [novel](#) by [J. D. Salinger](#).^[3] Originally published for adults, it has since become popular with adolescent readers for its themes of teenage confusion, angst, alienation,^[4] and rebellion.^[5] It has been translated into almost all of the [world's major languages](#).^[6] Around 250,000 copies are sold each year, with total sales of more than 65 million books.^[7] The novel's [protagonist](#) and [antihero](#), [Holden Caulfield](#), has become an icon for teenage rebellion.^[8]

The novel was included on *Time*'s 2005 list of the 100 best English-language novels written since 1923,^[9] and it was named by *Modern Library* and its readers as one of the [100 best English-language novels of the 20th century](#). It has been [frequently challenged](#)^{[10][11][12]} in the United States and other countries for its liberal use of [profanity](#) and portrayal of [sexuality](#). It also deals with complex issues of [identity](#), belonging, connection, and alienation.

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[\[edit\]](#) Plot summary

The majority of the novel takes place in December 1949. The story commences with [Holden Caulfield](#), the seventeen-year-old narrator and protagonist of *Catcher*, addressing the reader directly from a mental hospital in southern [California](#). He wants to tell us about events that took place over a two-day period the previous December. It is a frame story, or long flashback, constructed through Holden's memory as he describes encounters he has had with students and faculty of Pencey Prep (scholars often compare Pencey Prep to [Valley Forge Military Academy](#), which Salinger attended from the ages of 15 to 17) in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. He criticizes them for being superficial, as he would say, "phony."

Holden begins at Pencey Prep, an exclusive private school in Pennsylvania, on the Saturday afternoon of the traditional football game with school rival, Saxon Hall. Holden misses the game. Manager of the fencing team, he managed to lose the team's equipment on the subway that morning, resulting in the cancellation of a match in New York. He is on his way to the home of his history teacher, Mr. Spencer, to say good-bye. Holden has been expelled and is not to return after Christmas break, which begins Wednesday. Spencer is a well-meaning but long-winded old man, and Holden gladly escapes to the quiet of an almost deserted dorm. Wearing his new red hunting cap, he begins to read. His reverie is temporary. First, a dorm neighbor named Ackley disturbs him. Later, Holden argues with his roommate, Stradlater, who fails to appreciate a theme that Holden has written for him about Holden's deceased brother Allie's baseball glove. A womanizer, Stradlater has just returned from a date with Holden's old friend Jane Gallagher. The two roommates fight, Stradlater winning easily.

Holden has had enough of Pencey Prep and catches a train to New York City where he plans to stay in a hotel until Wednesday, when his parents expect him to return home for Christmas vacation.

He checks into the dilapidated Edmont Hotel. After observing the behavior of the "perverts" in the hotel room facing his, he struggles with his own sexuality. There, he spends an evening dancing with three tourist women in their thirties from Seattle in the hotel lounge and enjoys dancing with one but ends up with only the check. Following a disappointing visit to Ernie's Nightclub in Greenwich Village, Holden agrees to have a [prostitute](#), Sunny, visit his room.^[13] His attitude toward the prostitute changes the minute she enters the room, because she seems to be about the same age as Holden and starts to view her as a person. Holden becomes uncomfortable with the situation, and when he tells her that all he wants to do is talk, she becomes annoyed with him and leaves. However, he still pays her for her time. Sunny and Maurice, her [pimp](#), later return to Holden's hotel room and demand more money than was originally agreed upon. Despite the fact that Sunny takes five dollars from Holden's wallet, Maurice punches Holden in the stomach.

After a short sleep, Holden telephones Sally Hayes, a familiar date, and agrees to meet her that afternoon to go to a play. Meanwhile, Holden leaves the hotel, checks his luggage at Grand Central Station, and has a late breakfast. He meets two nuns, one an English teacher, with whom he discusses *Romeo and Juliet*. Holden looks for a special record for his 10-year-old sister, Phoebe, called "Little Shirley Beans." He spots a small boy singing "If a body catches a body coming through the rye," which somehow makes Holden feel less depressed. After seeing the play with Sally featuring Broadway stars [Alfred Lunt](#) and [Lynn Fontanne](#), the two go skating at Radio City, and while drinking coke Holden impulsively invites Sally to run away with him, but she declines. Her response deflates Holden's mood, which prompts a remark: "You give me a royal pain in the ass, if you want to know the truth," he tells her, regretting it immediately. Sally storms off as Holden follows, pleading with her to accept his apology. Finally, Holden gives up and leaves her there, sees the Christmas show at Radio City Music Hall, endures a movie, and gets very drunk. Throughout the novel, Holden has been worried about the ducks in the lagoon at Central Park. He tries to find them but only manages to break Phoebe's recording in the process. Exhausted physically and mentally, he heads home to see his sister.

Holden spends a total of three days in the city, and the time is characterized largely by drunkenness and loneliness. At one point he ends up thinking about the Museum of Natural History, where he went to frequently as a child. He contrasts his life with the statues of Eskimos on display. For as long as he can remember, the statues have been unchanging. These concerns may have stemmed largely from the death of his brother, Allie. Eventually, he sneaks into his parents' apartment while they are away, to visit his younger sister, Phoebe, who is the only person with whom he seems to be able to communicate. Holden and Phoebe are close friends as well as siblings. Holden shares a fantasy he has been thinking about (based on a mishearing of [Robert Burns'](#) *Comin' Through the Rye*): he pictures himself as the sole guardian of numerous children running and playing in a huge [rye](#) field on the edge of a cliff. His job is to catch the children if, in their abandon, come close to falling off the brink; to be a "catcher in the rye." Because of this misinterpretation, Holden believes that to be a "catcher in the rye" means to save children from losing their innocence.

After leaving his parents' apartment, Holden drops by to see a former and much admired English teacher, Mr. Antolini, in the middle of the night, and is offered advice on life and a

place to sleep. Mr. Antolini tells Holden that it is the mark of the mature man to live humbly for a cause, rather than die nobly for it. This is at odds with Holden's ideas of becoming a "catcher in the rye," a heroic figure who symbolically saves children from "falling off a crazy cliff" and being exposed to the evils of adulthood. During the speech on life, Mr. Antolini has a number of cocktails served in [highball glasses](#). Holden is upset when he wakes up in the night to find Mr. Antolini patting his head in a way that he regards as "[flitty](#)." There is much speculation on whether Mr. Antolini was making a homosexual advance on Holden or whether he was merely overreacting to a fatherly gesture made by Antolini. Holden leaves and spends his last afternoon wandering the city. He later wonders if his interpretation of Mr. Antolini's actions was actually correct, and seems to wonder how much it matters anyway.

Holden makes the decision that he will head out west and live as a deaf-mute. When he mentions these plans to his little sister Monday morning, she decides she wants to go with him. Holden declines her offer and refuses to have her accompany him. This upsets Phoebe, so Holden does her a favor and decides not to leave after all. Holden tries to reverse her saddened mood by taking her to the [Central Park Zoo](#). He realizes his mistake as she rides the [carousel](#) that lies within the zoo. He is filled with happiness and joy at the sight of Phoebe riding the carousel in the rain.

At the conclusion of the novel, Holden decides not to mention much about the present day, finding it inconsequential. He alludes to "getting sick" and living in a [mental hospital](#), and mentions that he'll be attending another school in September; he relates how he has been asked whether he will apply himself properly to study this time around and questions whether such a question has any meaning before the fact. Holden says that he doesn't want to tell us anymore, because surprisingly he found himself missing two of his former classmates, Stradlater and Ackley, and even Maurice, the elevator operator/pimp. He warns the reader that telling others about their own experiences will lead them to miss the people who shared them.

[\[edit\]](#) History

Various older stories by Salinger contain characters similar to those in *The Catcher in the Rye*. While at [Columbia University](#), Salinger wrote a short story called "Young Folks" in [Whit Burnett](#)'s class; one character from this story has been described as a "thinly penciled prototype of Sally Hayes". In November 1941, Salinger sold the story "[Slight Rebellion off Madison](#)", which featured Holden Caulfield, to *[The New Yorker](#)*, but it was not published until December 21, 1946, due to World War II. The story "[I'm Crazy](#)", which was published in the December 22, 1945, issue of *[Collier's](#)*, contained material that was later used in *The Catcher in the Rye*. A ninety-page manuscript about Holden Caulfield was accepted by *The New Yorker* for publication in 1946, but it was later withdrawn by Salinger.^{[\[14\]](#)}

[\[edit\]](#) 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. There is flow in the seemingly disjointed ideas and episodes; for example, as Holden sits in a chair in his dorm, minor events such as picking up a book or looking at a table, unfold into discussions about experiences.

Critical reviews agree that the novel accurately reflected the teenage [colloquial](#) speech of the time.^[15] Words and phrases that frequently appear include:

- "Phony": Superficial, hypocritical, and pretentious
- "That killed me": I found that hilarious or astonishing
- "Flit": Homosexual
- "Flitty": Homosexual behavior
- *Wuddya*: (the ya slang) vernacular rendering, idiomatic
- "Crumby": Inadequate, insufficient, and/or disappointing

[\[edit\]](#) Interpretations

Writer [Bruce Brooks](#) held that Holden's attitude remains unchanged at story's end, implying no maturation, thus differentiating the novel from [young adult fiction](#).^[16] In contrast, writer and academic [Louis Menand](#) thought that teachers assign the novel because of the optimistic ending, to teach adolescent readers that "alienation is just a phase."^[17] While Brooks maintained that Holden acts his age, Menand claimed that Holden thinks as an adult, given his ability to accurately perceive people and their motives such as when Phoebe states that she will go out west with Holden, and he immediately rejects this idea as ridiculous, much to Phoebe's disappointment. Others highlight the dilemma of Holden's state, in between adolescence and adulthood.^{[18][19]} While Holden views himself to be smarter than and as mature as adults, he is quick to become emotional. "I felt sorry as hell for..." is a phrase he often uses.^[18]

Peter Beidler, in his *A Reader's Companion to J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye"*, identifies the movie that the prostitute "Sunny" refers to in chapter 13 of *The Catcher in the Rye*. She says that in the movie a boy falls off a boat. The movie is [Captains Courageous](#), starring [Spencer Tracy](#). Sunny says that Holden looks like the boy who fell off the boat. Beidler shows (page 28) a still of the boy, played by child-actor [Freddie Bartholomew](#).

The novel's philosophy has been negatively compared with that of [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#).^[20]^{[\[clarification needed\]](#)}

Each Caulfield child has literary talent: D. B. writes screenplays in Hollywood; Holden also reveres D. B. for his writing skill (Holden's own best subject), but he also despises Hollywood industry-based movies, considering them the ultimate in "phony" as the writer has no space for his own imagination, and describes D. B.'s move to Hollywood to write for films as "prostituting himself"; Allie wrote poetry on his baseball glove; and Phoebe is a diarist.^[21]^{[\[not in citation given\]](#)} This "catcher in the rye" is an analogy for Holden, who admires in kids attributes that he struggles to find in adults, like innocence, kindness, spontaneity, and generosity. Falling off the cliff could be a progression into the adult world that surrounds him and that he strongly criticizes. Later, Phoebe and Holden exchange roles as the "catcher" and the "fallen"; he gives her his hunting hat, the catcher's symbol, and becomes the fallen as Phoebe becomes the catcher.^[22]

[\[edit\]](#) Reception

The Catcher in the Rye has been listed as one of the best novels of the 20th century. Shortly after its publication, writing for [The New York Times](#), Nash K. Burger called it "an unusually

brilliant novel,"^[23] while James Stern wrote an admiring review of the book in a voice imitating Holden's.^[24] 41st [United States president George H. W. Bush](#) called it "a marvelous book," listing it among the books that have inspired him.^[25] In June 2009, the [BBC's](#) Finlo Rohrer wrote that, 58 years since publication, the book is still regarded "as the defining work on what it is like to be a teenager. Holden is at various times disaffected, disgruntled, alienated, isolated, directionless, and sarcastic."^[26] [Adam Gopnik](#) considers it one of the "three perfect books" in American literature, along with *[Adventures of Huckleberry Finn](#)* and *[The Great Gatsby](#)*, and believes that "no book has ever captured a city better than *Catcher in the Rye* captured New York in the fifties."^[27]

Not all reception has been positive, however; the book has had its share of critics. Rohrer writes, "Many of these readers are disappointed that the novel fails to meet the expectations generated by the mystique it is shrouded in. J. D. Salinger has done his part to enhance this mystique. That is to say, he has done nothing."^[26] Rohrer assessed the reasons behind both the popularity and criticism of the book, saying that it "captures existential teenage angst" and has a "complex central character" and "accessible conversational style"; while at the same time some readers may dislike the "use of 1940s New York vernacular," "self-obsessed central character," and "too much whining."^[26]

[\[edit\]](#) Controversy

In 1960 a teacher was fired for assigning the novel in class; he was later reinstated.^[28]^{[[dead link](#)]} Between 1961 and 1982, *The Catcher in the Rye* was the most censored book in high schools and libraries in the United States.^[29] In 1981 it was both the most censored book and the second most taught book in public schools in the United States.^[30] According to the [American Library Association](#), *The Catcher in the Rye* was the tenth most frequently [challenged](#) book from 1990–1999.^[10] It was one of the ten most challenged books of 2005^[31] and although it had been off the list for three years, it reappeared in the list of most challenged books of 2009.^[32] The challenges generally begin with Holden's frequent use of vulgar language,^[33]^[34] with other reasons including sexual references,^[35] [blasphemy](#), undermining of family values^[34] and moral codes,^[36] Holden's being a poor role model,^[37] encouragement of rebellion,^[38] and promotion of drinking, [smoking](#), lying, and [promiscuity](#).^[36] Often the challengers have been unfamiliar with the plot itself.^[29] Shelley Keller-Gage, a high school teacher who faced objections after assigning the novel in her class, noted that the challengers "are being just like Holden... They are trying to be catchers in the rye."^[34] A reverse effect has been that this incident caused people to put themselves on the waiting list to borrow the novel, when there were none before.^[39]

[Mark David Chapman's shooting of John Lennon](#) (Chapman was arrested with his worn copy of the book, and inside, he had scribbled a note: "Dear Holden Caulfield, From Holden Caulfield, This is my statement"), [Robert John Bardo's shooting of Rebecca Schaeffer](#), and [John Hinckley, Jr.'s assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan](#) have also been [associated](#) with the novel.^[40]^[41]

In 2009 Salinger successfully sued to stop the U.S. publication of a novel that presents Holden Caulfield as an old man.^[26]^[42] The novel's author, [Fredrik Colting](#), commented, "call me an ignorant Swede, but the last thing I thought possible in the U.S. was that you banned books."^[43] The issue is complicated by the nature of Colting's book, *60 Years Later: Coming Through the Rye*, which has been compared to [fan fiction](#).^[44] Although commonly not authorized by writers, no legal action is usually taken^[45] against fan fiction since it is rarely

published commercially and thus involves no profit. Colting, however, has published his book commercially. Unauthorized fan fiction on *The Catcher in the Rye* existed on the Internet for years without any legal action taken by Salinger before his death.^[44]

[edit] Attempted adaptations

Early in his career, Salinger expressed a willingness to have his work adapted for the screen.^[46] However, in 1949, a critically panned film version of his short story "[Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut](#)" was released; renamed *My Foolish Heart* and taking great liberties with Salinger's plot, the film is widely considered to be among the reasons that Salinger refused to allow any subsequent movie adaptations of his work.^{[18][47]} The enduring popularity of *The Catcher in the Rye*, however, has resulted in repeated attempts to secure the novel's screen rights.^[48]

When *The Catcher in the Rye* was first released, many offers were made to adapt it for the screen; among them was [Sam Goldwyn](#), producer of *My Foolish Heart*.^[47] In a letter written in the early fifties, J. D. Salinger spoke of mounting a play in which he would play the role of Holden Caulfield opposite [Margaret O'Brien](#), and, if he couldn't play the part himself, to "forget about it." Almost fifty years later, the writer [Joyce Maynard](#) definitively concluded, "The only person who might ever have played Holden Caulfield would have been J. D. Salinger."^[49]

J. D. Salinger told Maynard in the seventies that [Jerry Lewis](#) "tried for years to get his hands on the part of Holden,"^[49] despite Lewis not having read the novel until he was in his thirties.^[39] Celebrities ranging from [Marlon Brando](#) and [Jack Nicholson](#) to [Tobey Maguire](#) and [Leonardo DiCaprio](#) have since made efforts to make a film adaptation.^[50] In an interview with *Premiere* magazine, [John Cusack](#) commented that his one regret about turning twenty-one was that he had become too old to play Holden Caulfield. Writer-director [Billy Wilder](#) recounted his abortive attempts to snare the novel's rights:

Of course I read *The Catcher in the Rye*....Wonderful book. I loved it. I pursued it. I wanted to make a picture out of it. And then one day a young man came to the office of [Leland Hayward](#), my agent, in New York, and said, 'Please tell Mr. Leland Hayward to lay off. He's very, very insensitive.' And he walked out. That was the entire speech. I never saw him. That was J. D. Salinger and that was *Catcher in the Rye*.^[51]

In 1961 J. D. Salinger denied [Elia Kazan](#) permission to direct a stage adaptation of *Catcher* for [Broadway](#).^[52] More recently, Salinger's agents received bids for the *Catcher* movie rights from [Harvey Weinstein](#) and [Steven Spielberg](#),^[53]^[dead link] neither of which was even passed on to J. D. Salinger for consideration.

In 2003 the [BBC](#) television program *The Big Read* featured *The Catcher in the Rye*, intercutting discussions of the novel with "a series of short films that featured an actor playing J. D. Salinger's adolescent antihero, Holden Caulfield."^[52] The show defended its unlicensed adaptation of the novel by claiming to be a "literary review", and no major charges were filed.

According to a speculative article in *The Guardian* in May 2006, there were rumors that director [Terrence Malick](#) had been linked to a possible screen adaptation of the novel.^[54]

After J. D. Salinger's death in 2010, Phyllis Westberg, who was Salinger's agent at [Harold Ober Associates](#), stated that nothing has changed in terms of licensing movie, television, or stage rights of his works.^[55] A letter written by Salinger in 1957 revealed that he was open to an adaptation of *The Catcher in the Rye* released after his death. He wrote: "Firstly, it is possible that one day the rights will be sold. Since there's an ever-looming possibility that I won't die rich, I toy very seriously with the idea of leaving the unsold rights to my wife and daughter as a kind of insurance policy. It pleasures me no end, though, I might quickly add, to know that I won't have to see the results of the transaction."^[56]

[\[edit\]](#) In popular culture

Main article: [Cultural references to the novel The Catcher in the Rye](#)

References to *The Catcher in the Rye* in media and popular culture are numerous. Works inspired by the novel have been said to form their own genre.^[17] Dr. Sarah Graham assessed works influenced by *The Catcher in the Rye* to include the novels *Less Than Zero* by [Bret Easton Ellis](#), *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by [Stephen Chbosky](#), *A Complicated Kindness* by [Miriam Toews](#), *The Bell Jar* by [Sylvia Plath](#), and *Ordinary People* by [Judith Guest](#).^[57] The popular band [Green Day](#) wrote their song "Who wrote Holden Caulfield?" because of the book.

In the DVD commentary for the film *Chasing Amy*, director [Kevin Smith](#) states his love of the book and names his characters Banky Edwards and Holden McNeal after the characters in *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Seminal 90's pop-punk outfit [The Ataris](#) sing about teenage angst on a track entitled "If you really want to hear about it..." (the opening line of the novel) taken from their studio album *End Is Forever*. The closing lyrics on the aforementioned track paraphrase the closing sentences of the novel.

[\[edit\]](#) See also

- [Book censorship in the United States](#)
- [Le Monde's 100 Books of the Century](#)

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- Pamela Hunt Steinle (2000.). *In Cold Fear: The Catcher in the Rye Censorship Controversies and Postwar American Character*. [Ohio State University Press](#).

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