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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Catcher in the Rye

by J.D. Salinger

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms

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The Catcher in the Rye

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss why this book uses interior monologue and comment on how the style of this book reflects the mind and speech of a sixteen-year-old youth.
2. arrive at a conclusion as to what type of personality Holden has and support this conclusion with references to the text.
3. state why this novel is, or is not, a good example of a “rite of passage” novel.
4. identify and discuss the qualities in this novel that have made it so popular with readers for almost forty years.
5. define and give examples from the novel of the following literary terms.
 - synecdoche
 - metonymy
 - verisimilitude
 - simile
 - irony
 - flashback
 - foil
 - hyperbole
 - digression
6. formulate at least one statement of theme that takes into account the title of the novel, the incidents the title refers to, and the actions of Holden throughout the story.

Note: All references come from the Little, Brown edition of *The Catcher In The Rye*, copyright 1951. Throughout the novel, Salinger has Holden Caulfield speaking to the reader in an informal, adolescent tone. As a result, there is frequent profanity. In addition, near the middle of the book a scene with a prostitute is described, but no sex occurs. The denigrating euphemism for homosexual, “flit,” is also used on various occasions.

The Catcher in the Rye

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. At the conclusion of this novel, do you think Holden's emotional condition has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed the same?
2. Since its publication as a novel in 1951, this book has been very popular with high school students. Identify three or four elements in this book that account for its popularity.
3. This novel has as its protagonist a young boy who goes to private schools in the 1940's. Is this novel relevant to the youth of today, or has it outlived its period and has little to say to today's adolescents? Adopt a point of view in response to this idea, and support your answer.
4. To what extent is the novel a good example of a "rite of passage" novel?
5. Holden Caulfield is an alienated youth. Identify who it is that he is alienated from, and discuss why he is alienated.
6. What gives this novel its distinctive style? Comment on how the style of this novel is different from the style of other novels.
7. A major theme in this novel is "loss of innocence." Cite those incidents in the novel that support this point; also cite the significance of the title and show how it relates to the theme.
8. Pick any two strangers Holden meets throughout the book. Describe how he deals with them. Compare and contrast his treatment of them with the way he treats people he actually knows.

Additional Exercise:

Keep a journal that covers a three-day period in some depth. While the experiences reported on should be yours, the style of reporting should be that of Holden Caulfield; that is, you should try to write your journal the way Holden might have written. You should consider both style and observations.

The Catcher in the Rye

Chapter 1

Vocabulary

grippe – flu-like disease

hemorrhage – uncontrolled bleeding

ostracized – separated; excluded from society

1. Who is the narrator in this story, at what point in time is he telling the story, and where is he when he is telling the story?

2. What kind of tone is established in the first paragraph, and how is it done?

3. What is it that Holden does not like about the Pencey Prep advertisement and about the headmaster, Thurmer?

4. In the second full paragraph of Chapter 1, why is Holden hanging around the cannon, freezing? What does this say about his personality?

5. Find an example in Chapter 1 of the narrator making a statement that is obviously false, which he expects the reader to believe. What do these repeated false statements tell you about Holden?

Chapter 5

1. Find one example of a simile.

2. Despite his dislike for Ackley's behavior, how does Holden demonstrate a sympathy for him in this chapter?

3. We learn of Holden's younger brother's death almost as an aside. How do we know the death was difficult for him, although he now talks about it in a casual way? What is unusual about the way Allie's death is first alluded to?

4. What indications are there that Holden might have idealized the memory of his dead brother?

5. What does the following quotation reveal about the two brothers?

I'll tell you what kind of red hair he had. I started playing golf when I was only ten years old. I remember once, the summer I was around twelve, teeing off and all, and having a hunch that if I turned around all of a sudden, I'd see Allie. So I did, and sure enough, he was sitting on his bike outside the fence—there was this fence that went all around the course—and he was sitting there, about a hundred and fifty yards behind me, watching me tee off. That's the kind of red hair he had.

6. In what way is Holden's red cap a symbol of his alienation?

Chapter 11

1. Holden can't stand the thought of Jane being sexually involved with Stradlater because he sees her as pure and innocent. In what way is her innocence—her shy, naive manner of living—emphasized in this chapter?

2. What literary term describes Holden's explanation of meeting Jane, the scene on her porch, and the movie incident?

3. Although Holden likes Ernie's piano playing, what is it that Holden dislikes about Ernie?

4. Find a sentence on in Chapter 11 that is a good example of Holden's general confusion about himself, other people, and life.
