
The Essence Of Teenage Angst in The Catcher in The Rye

By Jerome Salinger

While the *Catcher in the Rye* does indeed exemplify some common teenage anxieties, the novel takes it to a certain level that cannot be related to by all teenagers. Holden Caulfield illustrates an impressive amount of independence for the average teenager. He lives at a boarding school, for one, and decides to gather some money and hop on a train into the city to spend the weekend there on his own. This is something many modern teenagers could only dream of doing, for obvious safety concerns.

Not only this, but he is constantly going into bars and ordering alcoholic beverages, and only about half the time does he get denied. Putting aside all the technical inadequacies of the representation of the average teen, Holden's overall mindset both does and does not embody the majority of teenage minds. Holden is relatable in the sense that he struggles with grasping the sincerity of the society around him and often talks about loneliness, depression, and throws the idea of suicide around like it's not as big an issue as it is; as unfortunate as it may be, many teens can relate to such things in one way or another. Adolescence is not an incredibly easy stage, as a plethora of changes are occurring during this time. It is fairly normal for him to feel lonely at times and want to do anything to simply sit down and have a decent conversation with someone. It is also relatively normal for him to feel confused about the world and struggle between his innocence and maturity. In fact, the latter is one of the reasons why this book is so renowned for its embodiment of the average teenager.

Throughout the novel, Holden displays numerous acts of maturity for his age, such as finding himself a place to stay all weekend in New York City by himself and using his resources and contacts to keep himself safe. However, he also illustrates specific traits of a more immature, innocent character. For one, Holden often tries to avoid conflict as best he can, despite talking like he was tougher than he truly was. He also is extremely erratic and unpredictable in his behavior. For example, he was in the bathroom with his friend at Pencey when he "got bored of sitting on that washbowl after a while, so he backed up a few feet and started doing this tap dance, just for the hell of it" out of nowhere with no instigation. The symbolism in the novel also reveals his struggle in finding the balance between innocence and maturity in his adolescence. His reminiscence of his memories of the museum and his expression of love towards it, for instance, emphasizes his longing to live in a constant, unchanging society rather than the "phony" one that is his reality. This conceptual desire is also expressed within the title of the novel itself, as Holden explained how he wished he could be the "catcher in the rye," saving children from falling off the symbolic cliff of childhood and simplicity in an unchanging haven. While this struggle may indeed encompass certain aspects of the average teenage, the novel still seems to take the situation to a level that is more difficult to relate to, on a less philosophical point.

On the very surface, Holden's actions and overall mentality seem a little extreme to be called the embodiment of the average adolescent; instead, he simply comes across as socially inept and awkward, dark, and nose-y. In other words, without deep analysis, he just seems to illustrate the extremes of the teenage mind, rather than the majority. So, to most readers, Holden is just an outcast with a depressing, negative attitude. It is only with further investigation does his

representation of adolescence become clear.

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