

## SUPERVISOR'S REPORT

The supervisor should complete the report below and then give this cover, enclosing the final version of the extended essay, to the Diploma Programme coordinator. The supervisor must sign this report; otherwise the extended essay will not be assessed and may be returned to the school.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) \_\_\_\_\_

### Comments

If appropriate, please comment on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion H. Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate.

The choice of the topic of this essay is entirely due to candidate's own interest in Salinger's work and the suggested topic is informed by the candidate's interest. Mostly all the work done on the essay is of independent nature.

The ability of the candidate to work on his own account has proved to be fruitful since the final version of the essay is the best I have expected of the candidate. Even though there have been a few consultations during the process of the work Martins has listened to the advice and managed to produce a piece that demonstrates his ability to critically approach issues and analyse literature texts in the light of his own individual understanding of them.  
I think it is a good attempt.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent 3 hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# ASSESSMENT FORM (for examiner use only)

Candidate session number									
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## ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL

**General assessment criteria**  
*Refer to the general guidelines.*

	First examiner	maximum	Second examiner
A Research question		2	<input type="checkbox"/>
B Approach		3	<input type="checkbox"/>
C Analysis/interpretation		4	<input type="checkbox"/>
D Argument/evaluation		4	<input type="checkbox"/>
E Conclusion		2	<input type="checkbox"/>
F Abstract		2	<input type="checkbox"/>
G Formal presentation		3	<input type="checkbox"/>
H Holistic judgement		4	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Subject assessment criteria**  
*Refer to the subject guidelines.*  
*Not all of the following criteria will apply to all subjects; use only the criteria which apply to the subject of the extended essay.*

J			<input type="checkbox"/>
K			<input type="checkbox"/>
L			<input type="checkbox"/>
M			<input type="checkbox"/>

TOTAL OUT OF 36



Name of first examiner (CAPITAL letters): \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number:

Name of second examiner (CAPITAL letters): \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number:

Consistency of  
Holden Caulfield's  
behavior with his  
own standards in  
J.D. Salinger's  
'Catcher in the Rye'

Extended Essay in English B

**Word Count: 3009 words**

## Abstract

The following essay argues that Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of Jerome David Salinger's novel 'The Catcher in the Rye', is not consistent with the standards he has developed for the adult world he lives in. The research area is interesting to all readers of 'The Catcher in the Rye', since it leads to a better understanding of the novel, illuminates the plurality of opinions that the novel presents and, most importantly, complements other studies in the field that have focused on Holden Caulfield's personality.

The essay answers the following research question: *Is Holden Caulfield's own conduct different from his perception of hypocrisy of the adult world?* In order to answer the proposed question, in the first chapter of the essay Holden's perception of hypocrisy of the adult world will be described, organised and put into appropriate context. The second chapter is an evaluation of Holden's own behaviour and thinking within the framework of the ideas identified in the first chapter.

The results of the essay lead to a conclusion that Holden's behaviour does not differ from the conduct of other people that he perceives as hypocritical. In addition, the results allow identifying the most important reasons for Holden's failure to act according to his principles.

Word Count: 205 words



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## Introduction

'The Catcher in the Rye', a novel written by the American author Jerome David Salinger, is generally considered to be one of the most important books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First published in year 1951, the book instantly caused controversy in the United States because of the author's reluctance to avoid some topics that were then considered taboo in the American society: teenage sexuality, prostitution and suicidal desires. The novel is a portrayal of three days in the life of a mentally instable, sarcastic teenage boy Holden Caulfield. Literature scholars usually mention 'The Catcher in the Rye' as an example of a *bildungsroman*<sup>1</sup>: the major conflict of the novel is Holden's struggle to leave his childhood years behind and finally succumb to his subconscious temptations to accept the adult lifestyle that he truly despises. It would be a sensible guess to claim that the way how Salinger has depicted Holden's inability to avoid alienating with the adult world is one of the main reasons why 'The Catcher in the Rye' has touched teenager audiences all around the world.

Holden's harsh and cynical social commentary is often recognised as one of the most noteworthy parts of the novel. The teenage boy expresses distaste for his surroundings in a sarcastic and one-sided manner. It may be tempting to perceive Holden as a pure soul trapped in the middle of a hypocritical society; however, the truth is not that simple. As Margaret Atwood puts it, 'The answers you get from literature depend on the questions you pose'<sup>2</sup>. It is evident that Salinger

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<sup>1</sup> Anniken Telnes Iversen. 'Towards a polythetic definition of the bildungsroman: The example of Paul Auster's *Moon Palace*'. Accessed 08.09.2007. <<http://www.leidykla.eu/fileadmin/Literatura/49-5/str7.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> 'ThinkExist.com Quotations'. Accessed 08.09.2007. <<http://thinkexist.com/quotations/literature/3.html>>

gives the reader some hints that Holden's own behaviour is not always consistent with his vision of how the society ought to behave. It is a firm belief of the author of this essay that systematic analysis of Holden's consistency with the standards he has developed for the rest of the society would help to gain deeper understanding of the novel, would shed light on the plurality of opinions that the novel presents and, most importantly, would complement other studies in the field that focus on Holden Caulfield's personality.

To narrow the area of study to manageable proportions, the extended essay attempts to answer the following research question: *Is Holden Caulfield's own behaviour different from his perception of hypocrisy of the adult world?* In order to answer the proposed question, in the first chapter of the essay Holden's perception of hypocrisy of the adult world will be described, organised and put into appropriate context. The second chapter is an evaluation of Holden's own behaviour and thinking within the framework of the ideas identified in the first chapter.

## Chapter 1: Holden's standards

There is no direct way of observing the features that Holden Caulfield does not like about the adult lifestyle. In the majority of cases Holden does not point out these features explicitly, thus it is necessary to empirically observe his reactions in different situations. Although these reactions are often subtle and complicated to interpret, it is possible to identify the main causes of Holden's negative attitude towards the adult world.

Holden often uses the word 'phoniness', an umbrella term describing any kind of *deception and lies* that the boy encounters. Although he detests any sign of insincerity in his surroundings, the scale of Holden's reactions depends on the hidden motives of the people involved.

First of the motives to be insincere that Holden identifies in his narrative is *the pursuit of personal interests*. Living together with other adolescents, Holden often had the chance to see people being untruthful solely for their personal good. An example of opportunism that Caulfield saw in his surroundings was the boy's relationship with his roommate Stradlater. While their conversations appeared polite and friendly on the outside, it was easy to comprehend that Stradlater is mostly interested in Holden's jacket or his aptitude in writing compositions. The motives that drove Stradlater were the reason why Holden noted that he is 'phony kind of friendly'. Although Holden's response to Stradlater's mendacity was not harsh, it is important to point out that, in general, the existence of tangible rewards as a part of someone's motivation was a catalyst for Holden's instant aversion towards the person. An illustration of this idea is Holden's attitude towards the students in dormitories who stole his things and afterwards

pretended that they were not guilty. Such actions galvanised Holden and made him eager to 'sock' the liars.

Second motive to be dishonest that Holden observes in the adult world is *the inclination towards a certain social status*. As an antisocial character, Holden believes that it is foolish and unnecessary to alter one's behaviour just to fit into the society better. Caulfield often criticises other people for altering their demeanour because of any social requirements. For example, he expresses disdain towards his aunt and her charity work. Holden suspects that his aunt's real motivation is to appear better in the eyes of others, not to help people. In addition, the sixteen year old boy dislikes various socialising customs common in the adult world. Holden sees them as an act of losing one's individuality. That is why he dislikes the use of the word 'grand', handshakes and humour, all features of normal adult communication.

Holden sees himself as an advocate of egalitarian ideals and critically reflects on signs of *discrimination* that he notices in adult behaviour. Although he is not proactive in fighting against this aspect of adult life, Holden does not hesitate to make remarks about unequal and, to his mind, unfair treatment of different people. In Holden's opinion, such behaviour goes hand in hand with a propensity to maintain one's social status. For example, in the beginning of the novel Holden distastefully describes the conduct of his former headmaster in Elkton Hills. The boy notes that there was a notable disparity between the way the headmaster treated most parents and the way he treated parents that did not fit into his vision of decency. The headmaster had the tendency to ignore parents that were

not dressed appropriately, while being 'charming as hell'<sup>3</sup> with others. Such conduct clearly differed from Holden's ideals and 'made him so depressed he went crazy'<sup>4</sup>. It is essential to point out that, in contrast with other things that Holden disliked about the adult life, the existence of discrimination actually influenced his actions. When Holden's small sister Phoebe scolded him for dropping out of Pencey, he pointed out the existence of discriminating cliques in the school as one of the main reasons for his failure to apply himself. This exemplifies Holden's extremely negative attitude towards discrimination, since this is the only time in the novel when his detestation actually triggers any notable decisions, not only spontaneous actions.

An important feature of Holden's standards of hypocrisy of the adult world is different forms of an open *expression of sexuality*. Although it may not seem evident that sexuality may be a form of hypocrisy, in Holden's set of values it is so. He has a strong belief that mutual affection can be the only reason for someone to have sex. The thought that it is not always so strikes Holden as disgusting and lines up in his mind with other forms of hypocrisy of the adult world. For example, he is frustrated to think that Jane Gallagher, his childhood friend, has gone out with his roommate Stradlater and possibly had sex with him. He is annoyed because Jane has involved in an intimate relationship with a person she is not really familiar with. Moreover, Holden labels anything that slightly differs from the most conventional expressions of sexuality as not normal. Firstly, he does not like any conduct that is, in his opinion, disrespectful to the people involved. For

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<sup>3</sup> Jerome David Salinger. 'Catcher in the Rye'. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001, page 27

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, page 28

instance, after witnessing a scene where a couple is squirting water over each other, he thinks: 'I was probably the only normal bastard in the whole place'<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, Holden is overly sensitive to any signs of homosexuality. This is best illustrated with Caulfield's harsh response to the fact that his former teacher Mr. Antolini patted Holden's head during his sleep. The boy hastily interpreted this simple act as a sign of sexual interest.

Finally, a key feature of Holden's perception of hypocrisy of the adult world is *everything that he does not fit into his tastes*. This idea is captivated in Phoebe's criticism to Holden: 'You don't like a million things'<sup>6</sup>. While such vaguely defined concept cannot be used for the analysis performed in the second chapter of the essay, a failure to mention it amongst the other features would be failure to describe Holden's standards in full. Holden's dislike of different features of adult life frequently does not follow any distinguishable patterns. It is complicated for him to comprehend that people may be fond of things that he personally dislikes, and the result is a simplistic approach to people and their customs. Holden perceives the actions of these people as artificial and hypocritical, since he makes a faulty assumption that others should have similar tastes to his.

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<sup>5</sup> Jerome David Salinger. 'Catcher in the Rye'. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001, page 81

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 220

## Chapter 2: Evaluation of Holden's behaviour

By using the information provided in the first chapter, this chapter will perform an evaluation of Holden's own thinking and behaviour. For convenience, every major feature of Caulfield's standards will be analysed separately.

Holden does not recoil from his habit to twist the truth: 'I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life'<sup>7</sup>. Although Caulfield claims that he is avoiding the truth 'just for the hell of it'<sup>8</sup> and with no particular purpose, often his motives, including the pursuit of personal interests, can be identified. Holden does not see his actions as selfish, but they frequently help him to reach his personal aims. For instance, the reason why the boy fabricated improbable lies to the mother of his classmate Ernest Morrow was Caulfield's hidden, subconscious motives. Holden pleased her by making up stories about Ernest's fantastic personality just because he liked her and wanted to persuade her to go and have a drink with him. This example illustrates an important facet of Holden's problems to be consistent with his standards: *an inability to realise* what exactly he is doing. An even more insightful example is Caulfield's lies about his age when buying alcohol. Here, the cause-effect relationship is evident: Holden is misleading others to gain tangible rewards. These lies seem insignificant to the boy, and he fails to understand that he is precisely imitating a feature of the adult world that he despises.

In contrast with selfish interests, the social conformity factor is much more obvious in Holden's behaviour, especially in moments when he is dishonest. Although

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<sup>7</sup> Jerome David Salinger. 'Catcher in the Rye'. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001, page 22

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Page 67



it is one of the things that he hates in adult behaviour, Caulfield often adjusts his behaviour just to fit into his surroundings better. Holden manages to describe this paradox in a surprisingly precise way himself: 'when I'm with somebody that's corny, I always act corny too'<sup>9</sup>. The boy even accepts some of the rituals of the adult community that he despises. In many situations, he uses the word 'boy', shakes his head and performs other typical adult customs that he has derided in his narrative. Such conduct allows formulating another important aspect of Holden's inconsistency with his principles: sometimes the discrepancy is *deliberate* and caused by Holden's *incapacity to resist to external pressure*.

Although without an intent, Caulfield frequently manages to display discriminating attitudes against others. While Holden is consistent with his moral principles in his actions, his internal monologue reveals a much more complicated picture. Although without any evil intentions, Caulfield often makes mental remarks about different attributes of the people around him, especially about their financial status. For instance, Holden noted the financial position of his history teacher Mr. Spencer before even starting to talk to him. In addition, sometimes Caulfield's discriminating reactions can reach inexplicable levels. Holden explains these extremes himself: 'I can even get to hate somebody, just looking at them, if they have cheap suitcases with them'<sup>10</sup>. Although not all of his reactions are that harsh, he allows different personal attributes to influence his personal judgements in a variety of situations. Since Holden came from a wealthy family,

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<sup>9</sup> Jerome David Salinger. 'Catcher in the Rye'. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001, page 79

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, page 141

it is highly possible that his bringing up had an influence on his way of thinking about these issues.

Holden is fairly consistent with his principles in his sexuality. Although it is a fine line, he never acts in a way that contradicts his standards. However, there are several cases when Caulfield gets really close to violating his own rules. For example, during his stay in the motel, Holden bought a prostitute, a broad step away from mutual affection that the boy sees as the only possible reason for having sex. One of the main reasons why he decided not to involve with the prostitute was his own beliefs. This shows that in some cases Holden was willing and able to avoid infringing his standards. Even though Caulfield habitually contemplated the possibility to act differently, they merely were intellectual doubts and should be treated as such. For instance, after seeing the couple that squirted water on each other, he recognises the fact that such behaviour can be pleasant: 'It's really too bad that so much crumby stuff is a lot of fun sometimes'<sup>11</sup>. In general this feature shows that Holden occasionally is *able to withstand different influences and biases* to stick to his standards.

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<sup>11</sup> Jerome David Salinger. 'Catcher in the Rye'. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001, page 81

## Conclusions

By using the insights provided in the second chapter, it is possible to answer to research question of the extended essay.

In general, **Holden's own conduct is not different from his perception of hypocrisy of the adult world**. It is also feasible to identify the most important factors that have influenced the outcome of the research process:

- Holden's psychological background often prevents him from understanding the implications of his own actions. For this reason he often unintentionally violates the boundaries of his self-imposed standards.
- Sometimes Holden deliberately acts against his principles. Although he notes the negative features in his own behaviour, Holden mostly finds it complicated to fight with the pressure of various external and internal sources of influence.
- Holden's ability to act differently from his perception of hypocrisy is undermined by his susceptibility to external pressure and discriminatory prejudices. These two influences do not allow Holden to behave in a way he would want to.
- In some cases Holden is able to clearly distinguish his behaviour from hypocrisy of the adult world. However, some exceptions are not enough to influence the outcome of the research process.

There were some limitations of the research process:

- The analysis was based on the personal interpretation of the author of the essay. There is a significant possibility that interpretation was biased or limited because of the author's moral values and understanding of different aspects of human life.
- The author of the essay is not a native speaker of English. It is possible that this did not allow gaining full understanding of the novel.
- There is a notable time lag between the research process and the publishing of the novel. There is a possibility that it is unfeasible to fully understand the novel from the 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, since the society and its set of values has changed significantly.

Although the research process did not leave any unresolved questions, it would be interesting to see further research in some areas connected with the novel. It would be useful to compare Holden's behaviour with the moral standards of the American society in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Bibliography

- 1) Iversen, Anniken Ternes. 'Towards a polythetic definition of the bildungsroman: The example of Paul Auster's *Moon Palace*'. Accessed 08.09.2007. <<http://www.leidykla.eu/fileadmin/Literatura/49-5/str7.pdf>>
- 2) Salinger, Jerome David. 'Catcher in the Rye'. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001
- 3) 'ThinkExist.com Quotations'. Accessed 08.09.2007. <<http://thinkexist.com/quotations/literature/3.html>>