



## [The Catcher in the Rye](#), by J. D. Salinger

### **In A Nutshell**

*The Catcher in the Rye*, a novel narrated by main character and hero Holden Caulfield, is the story of Holden's life in the few days after being expelled from his Pennsylvania prep school. Published in 1951 by J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* has been banned more times than you want to count by zealous parents and educators. Not that anybody's *surprised* by this (because of the profanity, sex, alcohol abuse, prostitution – need we go on?), but interestingly, it's also frequently used as part of high school English classes. With more than 60 million copies sold to date, it's one of the world's top sellers (accordingly, it's been translated into many languages, including Russian, Spanish, German, and Japanese). *The Catcher in the Rye* is close to J.D. Salinger's heart; he has never allowed it to be produced as a film.

A lot of mystery and controversy surrounds J.D. Salinger. It seems he stopped publishing his work just when he was peaking as an author, and since then has been essentially a social recluse, granting no interviews and making no public appearances whatsoever. Some people think he's sort of a Holden Caulfield himself. *The Catcher in the Rye* ended up as an emblem of counterculture in the 1950s and 60s – a symbol of alienation and isolation for the disillusioned and restless post-war generation. Salinger's own isolation from society only amplifies the mystery and allure of this important book.

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- [The Catcher in the Rye Summary](#)
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## Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 How does Salinger tend to end chapters? What do these endings have in common? How do they work to set the tone of the novel?
- 2 *The Catcher in the Rye* centers around a young man – can women relate to this novel, too? What about Holden is gender-specific, and what is common to all teenagers?
- 3 Let's talk about the ending to *The Catcher in the Rye*. Is it optimistic? Negative? Gloomy? Look at the end of the second to last chapter (Twenty-Five), when Holden watches Phoebe go around on the carousel. Holden says, "I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could've been there." The next (and last) chapter pulls out of the narrative and returns to seventeen-year-old Holden, the one telling us the story in the first place. So how does Chapter Twenty-Five function as a closing to the story-within-the-novel? How is that ending different from the ending we see in Chapter Twenty-Six? Does the tone feel very different between the two? What might this tell us about how Holden is now (at seventeen) as compared to how he was then (at sixteen)?

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