Catcher In The Rye: Holden Caulfield A Misunderstood Teen

Holden Caulfield a Misunderstood Teen

Have you ever seen yourself through the character of a novel you are reading? I'm sure many of you can relate to the character of Holden from J.D Salinger's Bildungsroman novel Catcher in the Rye. The novel written in 1950, explores through first person narration, the life of Holden Caulfield a 16 year old boy as he tries to find his place in society. Throughout the novel we see him struggle with loss, isolation, not wanting to grow up and dealing with the expectations of the grown up world. Holden's story is a typical teenage story, making it relevant in today's society and an extremely worthy text to read.

What's it all about

The novel set in post-WWII New York, begins with the protagonist Holden Caulfield, as he recounts events that occurred 3 days following his expulsion from Pencey Prep, a private boarding school. Not ready to face his parents he goes to New York where he tries to cope with his feelings and find his place in a world he sees as full of 'phonies'. J.D Salinger had experienced the atrocities of WWII like the liberation of concentration camps. His experiences can be seen reflected in the character of Holden as he symbolically wishes to be the 'Catcher in the Rye' saving the innocence of children. Written in 1950 for an adult audience Salinger's use of taboo subjects, colloquial and often vulgar language made the novel controversial as society at the time was conventional. However, the novel has been eagerly adopted by teens as they relate to the language and topics raised. The purpose of the novel is to show the adult world a different perspective of the world through the eyes of adolescents and the struggles faced at a time of great change.

Impacts of Loneliness

Feelings of loneliness are a part of human nature, if you think about it, at some stage in our lives we have all experienced loneliness. Haven't you? This novel is a must read as it gives us insight into the turbulent emotions of being alienated from society. J.D Salinger uses Holden's unique voice to draw attention to the problems and consequences associated with alienation and hopefully with others in real life. Holden alienates himself from everyone and the world because he cannot conform to the expectation of his peers and the world around him. This is something the youth of today can recognise, having to live up to the expectations of others. An example is Holden's conversation with Mr Spencer, saying he feels trapped on 'the other side of life', metaphorically capturing isolation. The reader feels sympathy towards Holden, which is imperative if we want to be able to reflect on our own feelings of isolation. Isolation is often a mechanism of self protection as nobody wants to feel self-conscious or rejected. We see this when Holden sabotages his date with Sally by saying 'You give me a royal pain in the ass, if you want the truth', although he is lonely and wants to make connections, it's easier to reject her, showing us the viscous cycle of loneliness. Unfortunately, loneliness is still a current issue in today's society and is a complex part of human nature. Catcher in the Rye effectively

exposes the impacts of loneliness and isolation making this novel a worthy and relative text.

Letting go of the past

We all have something we have trouble letting go of, for Holden it was his childhood. The novel teaches us that it is important to let go of the past in order to move forward. Holden's use of colloquial, often cynical language makes Catcher in the Rye popular amongst teens. Holden is afraid of growing up as he views adults as 'phonies', he sees them as hypocritical, superficial and shallow and does not want to be like them. Ironically Holden himself is guilty of lying and deceiving others, "I left Elkton Hills because I was surrounded by phonies. That's all', here Holden's lie is a defence mechanism to be accepted by his peers. This is a key point as teenagers can relate to Holden's view of wanting to belong in society. Holden finds comfort at the Museum of Natural History as this non-changing environment appeals to him and symbolically captures Holden's hesitation to grow up, instead wanting to "Stop-time" and remain in childhood. However near the end of the book the progression of Holden's maturity is more noticeable, he no longer dreams of being the Catcher in the Rye. He realises the growth from innocence to maturity is inevitable, "The thing is with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them." the repetition of "fall" emphasises the fact that everyone needs to experience all aspects life the good and bad in order to grow up. This novel can relate to a contemporary audience as it explores the themes of growing up and can be beneficial to educate adolescences as they reach adulthood. This book is a must read for teens.

Life's lessons

Holden's unique voice draws us into the novel, through him we are able to gain a new perspective of the world around us, making J.D Salinger's Catcher in the Rye a must-read for teens and adults alike. How will you next view the world?