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YA Lit

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*The Catcher in the Rye*

Authors have been challenging literary norms and handling social issues for centuries, as demonstrated in classics such as *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley written all the way back in 1818. *Catcher in the Rye* is no different. Written in 1951 by J.D. Salinger, the story has been banned in numerous places since it's publishing for a number of reasons. Swearing, drinking, smoking, blasphemy, and prostitution are a couple subjects found in the book that adults find the need to shelter their kids from. But alas, even with it's controversial nature, the book is not so enjoyable to read as one would think. Although an important conversation about adolescence, mental health, and authenticity, the novel frustratingly lacks in action and twists, resulting in a tedious, unenjoyable let down.

*The Catcher in the Rye* follows the main character, Holden Caulfield, over the span of three days. Caulfield is a cynical, intelligent, and unenthused sixteen year old boy who flunks out of his prep school in Pennsylvania. Not long after, he finds himself wandering around the streets of New York City, as he has nothing else to do. On this exhilarating adventure, the reader learns about some of the people in Caulfield's life through his inner dialogue. He thinks about his younger sister Phoebe, his old friend Jane, and his younger brother Allie, who died of leukemia three years before the events of the book. It's important to note that the only person Caulfield seems to have a real bond with is Phoebe, which adds to the rather depressing and lonely tone of

the novel. In terms of plot, there isn't much. One of the more mildly interesting parts of the book is when Caulfield calls for a prostitute, but changes his mind and later gets beat up for not paying her. Other than that, the majority of what the reader gets to see is the image of a mildly depressed kid with a loud mind wandering around New York. Despite this, the end of the book is quite compelling in its ambiguity. The reader finds out that Caulfield ends up in psychiatric hospital, but is never told exactly why. He also reveals that he now misses some of the people who were a part of his story, which could hint at a change in his character and a break away from his usual reclusive nature. In the end, It's this lack of plot and desperate need of action that makes the novel less than exciting.

It would be a shocker to most to learn that this desolate piece of work was written by a man who carried the unpublished pages on his person while actively fighting in World War II. J.D. Salinger was drafted to fight in the Second World War in 1942 and had a prominent military career. He stormed the beach of Normandy, battled on D-Day, and fought in the Battle of the Bulge, all while carrying Holden Caulfield in his pocket. It's evident that as the war changed J.D. Salinger, Salinger changed Caulfield. This idea can be demonstrated in the closing line of the book, in which Caulfield warns the reader, "Don't ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody" (Salinger 214). This could reflect Salinger's experience in the war after witnessing all the lives lost, and could also be linked to his ensuing nervous breakdown. The novel's close connection with Salinger himself is a likely reason for the lack of action, as it's more focused on the emotional and mental aspect of life rather than the physical. This background knowledge definitely helps the reader develop a respect for the book, but doesn't make up for it's tediousness.

*The Catcher in the Rye* isn't an enjoyable or interesting read. It's lack of inaction or plot makes it incredibly difficult to get into, and it doesn't leave the reader with much to absorb or think about. The author's background and his military history definitely shine a new light on the book, but it doesn't change the blandness of the content. Overall, I would not recommend this book to anyone, especially not young readers. The novel is no longer scandalous to the new, desensitized generations.