HOLDEN’S TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD IN THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

Is there any reason somebody would be scared to grow up? Or a reason for a person to feel as if they were going to be somebody else when they get older? Gerontophobia, is the fear of growing up, which is the biggest fear for Holden Caulfield, one of four children, from The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger. He is somebody who lets the world get the best of him, and he is the one suffering for it. In the novel, you can invasion Holden being the ducks in the story that have to face the rest of the world, which is the ice they are surrounded by in the winter time. James Castle, Holden’s old school mate, killed himself rather then become a phony adult. Phoebe, Holden’s little sister, is still a child and Holden wants to protect her from becoming a phony when she gets older. Holden fears becoming a phony adult, and since James Castle did not

Strengths

• Good topic sentences
• Body ¶ #2 shows some solid analysis
• Fine conclusion.

Suggestions

• Use the pronoun he more frequently in your discussion. Alternate Holden and he. No need to use Holden all the time since we know who you’re talking about.
• The first body paragraph is a full discussion—but I want you to make a clearer connection to your thesis that Holden is afraid of growing up—What is Horowitz teaching Holden in connection to this?

This represents your strongest writing of the year, I think. It’s still at the B-level, since (1) the analysis is closer to summarizing the events of the novel instead of leaping toward fresh ways of understanding Holden and (2) your sentences are solid but lack the rich variety of more sophisticated essays. However, the essay is fully developed, well organized overall, and represents serious thinking about the novel. It’s also clean overall, when you were worried that perhaps it wasn’t.
make it, and Phoebe is still growing up, he wants to know where the ducks go to help him find his way. Salinger uses the plight of the ducks, James Castle, and Pheobe, to symbolize Holden’s fear of growing up and becoming a phony.

Holden’s interest in the ducks represents his curiosity about what will happen to him when he grows up. Holden wonders what happens to the ducks when the pond freezes over in the winter. Holden starts to think about this question when he begins to talking to Mr. Spencer about how he flunked out of Pencey. Then, as soon as Holden gets to Manhattan, he immediately asks his cab driver where the ducks go in the winter. It’s not until Holden meets a cab driver named Horowitz that he gets an answer. Holden tells Horowitz, a crazy cab driver, “[the ducks] can’t just ignore the ice. They can’t just ignore it” (83). Holden is saying that they cannot ignore the ice because they will freeze otherwise. The primary reason that Holden importunes Horowitz about the ducks is because Holden truly believes that what happens to the ducks will happen to him. Horowitz tells Horowitz about the fish and says, “Their bodies take in nutrition and all, that’s their nature for chrissake” (83). Horowitz says this to Holden because he wants him to realize that the fish naturally survive this way. Even though the ducks are surrounded with ice, they let Mother Nature take its course by waiting it out and knowing they are going to survive. Horowitz goes on to say, “If you was a fish, Mother Nature’d take care of you, wouldn’t she?” Then he says, “You don’t think them fish just die when it gets to be winter, do ya?” (84). This relates directly to Holden because he is afraid that he isn’t going to survive through these troubles in his life, but he does not realize that the ducks are going to survive because they are in their natural habitat, and so will he since he is in his natural habitat. Also, Horowitz talks about how it is tough for the fish to live because they are both stuck in a dangerous situation. Holden connects the living situation of the ducks and the fish to him because they do not know what to
do in the ice but as well Holden does not know what to do in his near death situation. Horowitz is essentially saying that everything is part of nature, so they have to let everything take its course and then they will survive.

Holden is afraid of becoming a phony adult and in the same way that he has been kicked out of his prep schools; the ducks have been kicked out of their pond. On a drunken night, Holden goes from wondering about where the ducks go to actually looking for them in Central Park because he wants to find out how they transition from winter to spring and if he can follow their path. When he walks really close to the pond, he progressively increases his fear of the future. He thinks, “Anyway, I kept worrying about pneumonia, with all those hunks of ice in my hair, and that I was going to die” (155). Holden has the ice in his hair just like the ducks have all of the ice where they are living in the winter. Holden is scared he is going to die because in the story, the ducks do not have anywhere to live because of the ice in the pond. Walking around the lake, he tells the reader, “I walked around the whole damn lake-I damn near fell in once- but I didn’t see a single duck” (154). In this scene, Holden is physically creating danger for himself by almost falling in to the icy lake, which could kill him, but he is also creating mental danger because although Horowitz told him to let himself to rely on Mother Nature, Holden is not ready to believe it.

One person that has a large impact on how Holden thinks of people in the world is James Castle. Before he dies, Holden thinks that James Castle is one of few people in the world that is not a phony but like the ducks, is also not available, to guide Holden. Holden is impressed by James Castle because of the way he stands up to people, especially when he is bullied by a couple kids who want James to take back what he said to them involving them being conceited. Holden remembers, “I won’t even tell you what they did to him-its repulsive-but he still
wouldn’t take it back, old James Castle” (170). Holden respects James and how even though he had something absolutely nauseating done to him, Holden still appreciates what he did because it was an act that deserves recognition in his eyes. In Holden’s perspective, this is the most important example of how James Castle does not act like a phony. When Holden is remembering what had happened to James Castle, he thinks, “Finally, what he did, instead of taking back what he said, he jumped out the window” (170). Holden views this situation as one that is significant because he feels that since James Castle is not a phony and he died, the same will happen to him. He truly believes this because his mental image of somebody that is not a phony is someone who will do anything to stand up for what they believe in. In this case, James Castle died for what he believed in, which is Holden’s true image of an honest person. Also, Holden truthfully believes that he is going to die, primarily because all of the other honest people that he knows have died, such as James Castle.

Holden is afraid to grow up is because he is scared that he will become a phony. When Phoebe asks Holden why he is so scared to be grown up, Holden exclaims, “How would you know you weren’t being a phony? The trouble is, you wouldn’t” (172). Because Holden strongly considers himself as ostracized by society for the reason being that he is a non phony, he believes that when he gets older, it is certain he will become a kind of person that is fake, or somebody that in his eyes doesn’t live a unique life. Also, Holden is afraid that when a person becomes an adult and completely leaves their childhood existence, they will have no way of being able to tell the difference between somebody who lives their own life the way they would like to by having their own style and not following the rest of the society, or somebody who does follow the rest of the culture of the world around themselves, causing them to be no more special than anybody else living. This is why he wants to be conscientious with Phoebe. When Holden
considers being a lawyer like his father, he says, “Even if you did go around saving guys’ lives and all, how would you know if you did it because you really wanted to save guys’ lives, or because you did it because what you really want to do was be a terrific lawyer” (172). Holden wants to be a person who lives an honest life, but without the guidance of James Castle and the ducks, he feels lost.

The final part of the story involves Holden’s survival from the transformation to adulthood and his coming to the realization that kids need to be allowed to take risks and they will survive. This happens when he is in the bathroom of his favorite Museum, when he hits the ground. He tells the reader, “I mean I could’ve killed myself when I hit the floor, but all I did was land on my side. It was a funny thing, though. I felt better after I passed out. I really did” (206). This “fall” that Holden experiences is a vital one for his existence because he realizes how important life really is to him. In the beginning of the story, Holden strongly believes that he is going to die because James Castle died. Once Holden accepts his adulthood, he realizes that believes that most kids are not phonies and they have to be able to figure out life on their own way. At the time when Holden was watching Pheobe go around and around on the carousel, he thinks to himself, “The thing 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 (211).” Holden believes kids don’t take risks on their own then they will be no different than any other child living in the world.

Holden’s transition from childhood to adulthood is an interesting changeover because numerous different things occur. His involvement with the Horowitz along with the ducks, James Castle, Central Park, Pheobe, and his survival in the end, all contribute to his conversion to becoming an adult. With Horowitz, Holden is told that he needs to wait and let nature take its
course for him to be safe. Thinking about James Castle, Holden is getting worse in his situation because he starts to believe that he is going to die because the other non phonies he knows have all died. Walking around Central Park is putting Holden in more danger to die because he is not letting Mother Nature take care of him. Talking to Pheobe and hanging out with her made him realize that he can be happy. Then in the end, Holden finally survives the downfall of his life, and transitions into adulthood. It took him a while but Holden overcame his gerontophobia and continue living again for what he will call normal.