1. BACKGROUND: REVIEW KEY IDEAS FROM THE UNIT

a. What is the novel about—Adolescence or Grief, or Something Else? After reading the novel, one question to ask is this: What is this novel really about? Is it primarily about adolescence and adolescent despair, for instance, OR is this a novel about grief and the challenging process of overcoming it? We’ve discussed the loss of innocence and the need to protect it (remember the letter to Virginia). Maybe the novel is essentially about this aspect of growing up. Others (Trowbridge) have discussed the novel and Holden’s problem as “the plight of the idealist in the modern world.”

b. What is the major dilemma that Holden struggles with? Growing up into a corrupt and phony culture of materialism and compromised ideals OR dealing with the loss of his perfect brother Allie and reconciling the death of innocence with him? The novel of course deals with both issues (and others—social class, school, religion/Christianity, sex) and different readers will pull different meanings from it. In addition, these two themes might be very closely related to each other, one problem feeding into or from the other. Still, one way of thinking about the novel is likely to resonate with you the more than another.

2. ASSIGNMENT: ANALYZE A DIGRESSION FROM THE NOVEL

On the first page of the novel, Holden promises to tell the story “about this madman stuff” that happened to him. Yet throughout his account he regularly veers off on digressions that do not appear at first to be relevant to his original promise.

In an essay of approximately 1300+ (4-5 pages) words, analyze one or several of digressions to show how Salinger creates larger meaning for the reader.

Be sure to begin with a clear thesis and support your argument about the novel with evidence from the text. Effective use of quotations is central to making a convincing argument in a literary essay.

Two Options

a. STARTING-OFF-POINT DIGRESSION. The digression you choose can be a starting off point, after which you’ll explore different places in the novel that are related to it, and ultimately discuss why this theme is so important to the novel.

• EXAMPLE: Take Dick Slagle’s suitcases (108-9). First, discuss Holden’s interest in social status and wealth that is represented by this digression. Next, find other places in the novel that show Holden’s interest in social status and wealth. Finally, tie these together to discuss what Holden’s obsession with social status and wealth says about both his dilemma and the novel overall. In sum, how is Salinger using the digression about Dick Slagle’s suitcases to point us in the direction of understanding the novel?

  • Intro/Summarize Dick Slagle’s suitcases ➔
  • other digressions/incidents about wealth and status ➔
  • big picture understanding about the novel!
b. **ONE-IS-ENOUGH DIGRESSION.** The digression you choose can be a single digression that has so much in it that you can spend the whole essay discussing its importance to the novel overall.

- **EXAMPLE #1:** Take the movie that Holden sees about “this English guy, Alec something” (138-9). If you look through this movie summary that Holden gives, you might see many references to Holden’s experience in the novel. First, summarize the events of the movie. Next, take each important part of the story and show how it relates to Holden’s story. Finally, tie Alec’s and Holden’s story together to discuss what Salinger is saying about both Holden’s problem and the novel overall. (Any movie plot that Holden discusses in the novel might work also.)
  - Intro/Summarize the movie about Alec ➔
  - connect each important moment to Holden ➔
  - big-picture understanding about the novel!

- **EXAMPLE #2:** Holden’s interest in the ducks and the lagoon in Central Park comes up at several places in the novel. Discuss each of these places and tie them together to discuss what Salinger seems to be saying to the reader. First discuss the various digressions. Next, discuss each reference independently. And finally tie the various duck/lagoon digressions together to discuss what Salinger is saying about Holden’s story and the novel overall.
  - Intro/Summarize Holden’s various digressions about the ducks ➔
  - discuss each reference to the ducks specifically ➔
  - discuss the big-picture importance of the ducks!

**Getting Started**
- **Brainstorm/Free-write.** Look for short or medium-length digressions that interested you in the novel. (These can be a short as one or two lines and as long as two pages.) Look over your reading questions for ideas; look at your passages of interest. Flip through the pages of the novel, trying to remember small characters or moments.

  **SOME POSSIBLE STARTING PLACES:**
  - Once-mentioned characters: Selma Thurmer, Harris Macklin (the whistler), Al Pike, Faith Cavendish, Miss Aigletinger, Gertrude Levine, Dick Slagle. Perhaps you can see some characters as foils (comparisons) for Holden.
  - Movies—pick out the the plot of any of the movies mentioned (better yet, find it and watch it).
  - Small out-of-the way stories: Mr. Cudahy, Jane’s drunk stepfather; Allie and Holden listening to the kettle drummer at Radio City.

- **Gather Evidence—Find Quotations.** Look through the novel for quotations that you think may be related to the topic you’re writing about. Using index cards, write down the quotation word-for-word on one side of the index card and then thoughts about why you think this quotation is important on the other.

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**3. CELEBRATION: SHARE WHAT YOU’VE LEARNED—**CATCHER SYMPOSIUM

**YOU ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE AS A SCHOLAR AT A CATCHER IN THE RYE SYMPOSIUM**

On Friday Jan 22, the day the essay is due, plan on presenting your paper and findings at a Catcher in the Rye symposium for other serious scholars interested in exploring new passages of interest in the novel—or common passages that reveal new or interesting meanings. Each one of you will share your findings in a large-group mingle and then discuss your paper in a one-minute presentation that includes your paper’s title and major discovery or idea.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Just Beginning</th>
<th>Approaching Expectations</th>
<th>Meets Expectations</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLOUT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Topic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis Statement</strong></td>
<td>Does not respond to the prompt and/or is a summary of plot</td>
<td>Is invalid or is valid but may not respond adequately to the prompt</td>
<td>Is a focused, debatable, valid response to prompt; may attempt a “so what?”</td>
<td>Is a sophisticated, insightful response to the prompt; has an effective “so what?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting Points and Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Evidence is irrelevant or insufficient to illustrate supporting points and/or thesis;</td>
<td>Evidence is occasionally irrelevant or insufficient to support points and/or thesis.</td>
<td>Evidence is well-chosen and sufficient to develop supporting points and thesis.</td>
<td>Evidence is rich in language, well-chosen and effectively supports points and thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis of Evidence</strong></td>
<td>Explanation of evidence reads like plot summary, restates the quotation, or is omitted in places.</td>
<td>Explanation of evidence attempts to go beyond summary; analysis may lack validity at some points.</td>
<td>Analysis of evidence is valid and convincingly supports thesis.</td>
<td>Analysis explains significance of language, and thoughtfully and convincingly supports thesis.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CLARITY</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>May not begin with an introduction ending in the thesis; body paragraphs may lack topic sentences; essay may lack a conclusion.</td>
<td>Introduction ends in thesis; has some transitions between paragraphs; topic sentences may be insufficient, plot-oriented, or vague; has a conclusion.</td>
<td>Effective intro ends with thesis; has transitions; topic sentences go beyond plot and concluding sentences present; conclusion begins by restating the thesis and ends with an attempt at a “so what?”</td>
<td>Interesting and effective intro; has smooth transitions; orders body paragraphs effectively; topic sentences make arguments and concluding sentences connect to thesis; conclusion ends with a “so what?”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CLASS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Voice, Tense</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vocab, Variety</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Voice, Tense</strong></td>
<td>Many instances of informality or 1st/2nd person; uses past tense regularly</td>
<td>Few instances of informality or 1st/2nd person; occasional use of past tense</td>
<td>Appropriately formal 3rd person; uses present tense</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Word Choice &amp; Sentence Variety</strong></td>
<td>Incorrect and mostly unclear wording; simple sentences</td>
<td>Occasionally unclear wording; some sentence variety</td>
<td>Mostly clear wording; has sentence variety</td>
<td>Precise and sophisticated wording; varies sentences for effect</td>
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<td><strong>CLEANLINESS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanics &amp; Proofreading</strong></td>
<td>Many distracting errors and/or typos</td>
<td>Some errors and/or typos</td>
<td>Minimal errors and/or few typos</td>
<td>No errors in areas covered in class or typos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quotation Integration</strong></td>
<td>Rarely cited correctly or integrated smoothly</td>
<td>Mostly cited correctly and integrated smoothly</td>
<td>Cited correctly and integrated smoothly</td>
<td>Cited correctly and integrated in sophisticated ways</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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