J.D. Salinger’s  The Catcher in the Rye

READING ASSIGNMENT QUESTIONS

READING STRATEGIES AMONG STRONG READERS

**QUESTION**
Ask questions while you read—to check your understanding, or to further it.

**CONNECT**
Connect to what you already know—about yourself, other books, the world.

**VISUALIZE**
Imagine the scenes you’re reading about; **MAKE MOVIES IN YOUR MIND**.

**SUMMARIZE**
Check that you can **RESTATE WHAT YOU’RE READING IN YOUR OWN WORDS**.

**INFERENCE**
Draw a conclusion about the story based on what you read—**EVEN IF IT’S NOT SPECIFIED**.

**REPAIR**
Don’t be afraid to **STOP IF YOU DON’T GET SOMETHING** and try to figure out why you don’t.

Higher-Order and CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS
(Barbara Scheffer, M. Gale Rubenfeld, *Critical Thinking for Nurses*, 2000 [found on a University of Michigan chemical engineering site on problem solving: http://www.umich.edu/~elements/probsolv stratégie/ctskills.htm])

- **ANALYZING/ORGANIZING**. Separating or breaking a whole into parts to discover their nature, functional and relationships.

- **APPLYING STANDARDS/JUDGING**. Judging according to established personal, professional, or social rules or criteria.

- **DISCRIMINATING—RANKING/GROUPING**. Recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank.

- **INFORMATION SEEKING—GATHERING EVIDENCE**. Searching for evidence, facts, or knowledge by identifying relevant sources and gathering objective, subjective, historical, and current data from those sources.

- **LOGICAL REASONING/MAKING INFERENCES**. Drawing inferences or conclusions that are supported in or justified by evidence.

- **PREDICTING**. Envisioning a plan and its consequences.

- **TRANSFORMING KNOWLEDGE**. Changing or converting the condition, nature, form, or function of concepts among contexts.
Reading #1: Chapters 1-4 (pgs. 1-35)
Comprehension Questions are OPTIONAL for credit. Critical-Thinking Open Responses are COMPULSORY.

Chapter 1 (1-6)
- Who is a prostitute? What is Holden’s meaning?
- Describe the plot of “The Secret Goldfish”?
- Why does he say he likes Selma Thurmer? What does this suggest about Holden’s character?
- On page 4, what was he “really hanging around for”? What effect does this have on the reader’s understanding of Holden’s internal conflict?

1. What kind of place is Holden when he is telling this story? Give evidence for your reasoning.

2. Where is Holden sitting while he is watching the football game and why does he say he’s there? What does Holden’s physical placement in the story suggest to the reader about Holden?

Chapter 2 (6-16)
- On the bottom of page 8, why is Holden upset about life being a “game”? How is the reader meant to identify with Holden as the chapter begins?
- Give Holden’s age (and how old does he say he acts?) and height and tell what is unusual about his hair. Suggest one reason this detail may be significant to the reader.
- What does Holden write in his note to Mr. Spencer at the end of his history exam? (Paraphrase the note.) What was the topic of the essay? What does this suggest about Holden’s character?

3. What distracting topic does Holden think about while he "shot the bull" with Mr. Spencer? What does he wonder? What does this detail suggest about Holden’s character?

Chapter 3 (16-26)
- Who is Ossenburger and what is Holden’s opinion of him?
- What kind of hat does Holden wear? Where did he get it? (Pay attention to this detail as it becomes a meaningful symbol during the narrative.)
- What evidence is there that Holden is a good English student? What "really knocks me out,” according to Holden?
- What does Holden do with his hat while he is horsing around with Ackley on the bottom of page 21? Later, on the bottom of page 22, what kind of hat does he say it is? Suggest some significance to this detail.

4. How does Holden open Chapter 3? Why is this statement troublesome for the reader?

Chapter 4 (pp.26-35)
- Why does Holden call Stradlater a "secret slob”? How might Holden also be a secret slob, from what you know of him so far?
- What is the favor Stradlater asks Holden to do for him? Why does Holden think this is ironical?
- Describe Jane’s stepfather.
- Why does Holden pull his hat down again? (Why is he "getting sort of nervous“?) At the end of the chapter, why was Holden glad to see Ackley, "for once in my stupid life”?

5. How does Holden know Jane Gallagher? What was strange about Jane’s checker-playing habit? How does this detail suggest a significant connection between Holden and Jane?

Critical Thinking—Choose ONE of the following prompts to respond to.
LOGICAL REASONING/MAKING INFERENCES (drawing inferences or conclusions that are supported in or justified by evidence). What is Holden’s reasoning for not going down to see Jane? What might Holden’s emotional reasoning be, if he could vocalize it?

OR

DISCRIMINATING—RANKING (recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank). Choose a sentence or passage from the reading that stands out for you for ANY reason (maybe it’s funny, important, puzzling—any reason). Be sure to cite its page number—and explain why it’s so important either to the story or to you.

Reading #2: Chapters 5-8 (pgs. 35-58)
Comprehension Questions are OPTIONAL for credit. Critical-Thinking Open Responses are COMPULSORY.
Chapter 5 (pp. 35-39)
• Why didn’t Holden throw the snowball he had made? What do we learn about Holden from the reasons he gives for not throwing it?
• What does Holden do with Ackley and Mal Brossard that evening?

1. Who is Allie and what happened to him? Give three examples of why Holden liked Allie—and what do these examples say about Holden himself?

2. Why did Holden have to be psychoanalyzed? How does Salinger intend for us to understand the importance of this detail?

Chapter 6 (pp. 40-46)
• Describe the fight between Holden and Stradlater.
• What does Holden search for on the bottom of page 45? Suggest why this item is so important to Holden.

3. Give one specific reason why Stradlater doesn’t like the composition that Holden wrote for him. What does Holden do to the composition? How do you explain Holden’s reaction?

Chapter 7 (pp. 47-52)
• How many times does Holden say to himself that he feels lonely? Count them and be ready to read them aloud in class.
• What decision does Holden make at the spur of the moment?
• What are Holden’s final words to the Pencey students? And then what happens to him on the stairs?

4. What does Holden “toy” with the idea of joining on page 50? What is the significance of Holden’s interest in this?

Chapter 8 (53–58)
• Who is the person Holden meets on the train? What does Holden think of her son? What does Holden tell the woman about her son?
• What other lies does Holden tell the woman about:
  o his health
  o his summer vacation plans

5. Why does Holden lie to the woman? After all, he had nothing to gain by lying.

Critical Thinking—Choose ONE of the following prompts to respond to.
LOGICAL REASONING/MAKING INFERENCES (drawing inferences or conclusions that are supported in or justified by evidence). In Chapter 5, why doesn't Holden throw the snowball he had made? What do we learn about Holden from the reasons he gives for not throwing it? What is the importance of this small detail?

OR

DISCRIMINATING—RANKING (recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank). Choose a sentence or passage from the reading that stands out for you for ANY reason (maybe it's funny, important, puzzling—any reason). Be sure to cite its page number—and explain why it's so important either to the story or to you.

<table>
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<th>Reading #3: Chapters 9-12 (pgs. 59-87)</th>
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Chapter 9 (59-66)

1. According to Holden, on page 62, what "kind of junk is sort of fascinating to watch, even if you don't want it to be"? Give a definition of the word "crumby" as used on that page. What is Holden's attitude toward sex—and how is this consistent with what we know of Holden's character so far?

Chapter 10 (66-76)

2. What color is Phoebe's hair? How old is she? Why does Holden like her?

Chapter 11 (76-80)

3. This chapter is mainly a flashback about Jane Gallagher. What do we learn about each of the following from this flashback?
   a. Holden's mother's relationship with Jane and her mother
   b. Jane's attitude toward her stepfather (Why does she cry on the porch? [p. 78])
   c. Jane's relationship with Holden

Chapter 12 (pp. 81-87)

4. What makes Holden "feel so lonesome and depressed" on page 81? What does this suggest about Holden's dilemma, now that it has emerged in the novel?

Critical Thinking—Choose ONE of the following prompts to respond to.
ANALYZING/ORGANIZING  (Separating or breaking a whole into parts to discover their nature, functional and relationships).  Explore a meaningful connection/relationship between the women Holden discusses in this section:  Phoebe, the Seattle tourists, and Jane.

OR

DISCRIMINATING—RANKING  (recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank).  Choose a sentence or passage from the reading that stands out for you for ANY reason (maybe it’s funny, important, puzzling—any reason).  Be sure to cite its page number—and explain why it’s so important either to the story or to you.
Reading #4: Chapters 13-15 (pgs. 88-113)
Comprehension Questions are OPTIONAL for credit. Critical-Thinking Open Responses are COMPULSORY.

Chapter 13 (pp.88-98)
- What has Holden lost that causes him to worry about him being "yellow?" What does he think might be the cause of his being ("partly") yellow?
- Who propositions Holden about getting a prostitute?
- How much does the prostitute want to charge Holden? What does Sunny call Holden on her way out the door?

1. Sunny the Prostitute. Describe the physical appearance of Sunny the prostitute. What details suggest a similarity with Holden? What is the importance/meaning of Holden’s decision to cut their meeting short?

Chapter 14 (98-104)
- What incident in his relationship with Allie does Holden feel somewhat guilty about?
- About 5 a.m. there is a knock on Holden’s door. Who is knocking and what do they want? What does Holden say that results in his getting punched in the stomach?
- What does Holden imagine himself doing after he got punched? Suggest the significance of this moment.

2. Whom does Holden talk to when Sunny leaves? How should the reader see significance in this?

3. List the significant details of the last paragraph of Chapter 14? And briefly explain their significance.

Chapter 15 (105-113)—Sunday Morning
- What does Holden’s father do for a living?
- What does Holden give to the two people in the restaurant? What play does Holden discuss with the two people in the restaurant? What character in the play does Holden like best? Why?

4. On page 108, Dick Slagle, a former roommate of Holden’s, criticizes some of Holden’s belongings as being "bourgeois." What was Dick Slagle trying to say about Holden’s belongings by calling them this? What does this tell the reader about Holden?
Critical Thinking—Choose ONE of the following prompts to respond to.

LOGICAL REASONING/MAKING INFERENCES (drawing inferences or conclusions that are supported in or justified by evidence). Why might Holden be more likely to call Sally Hayes for a date than Jane Gallagher?

OR

DISCRIMINATING—RANKING (recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank). Choose a sentence or passage from the reading that stands out for you for ANY reason (maybe it’s funny, important, puzzling—any reason). Be sure to cite its page number—and explain why it’s so important either to the story or to you.
Reading #5: Chapters 16-17 (pgs. 113-134)

Comprehension Questions are OPTIONAL for credit. Critical-Thinking Open Responses are COMPULSORY.

Chapter 16 (113-122)

• How is the criticism Holden has of Sally’s mother consistent with Holden’s character?
• How is the content of the song “Little Shirley Beans” consistent with Holden’s story?
• What does Holden think about the movies? Be specific; give at least three of the reasons Holden gives. What does Holden think about actors?
• Where does Holden go in search of Phoebe? Mention at least two specific places.

1. At one point Holden follows a family that is walking down the street. Where is the child from the family walking? Give the exact words of the song he’s singing. Suggest why the scene somehow soothes Holden.

2. When Holden was in grade school, he used to go on class trips to the Museum of Natural History. What were his impressions of this museum? What was “the best thing” about it? Why is this “best thing” significant to the story?

Chapter 17 (123-134)

• Who does Sally meet in the lobby during the intermission of the play? Why is this problematic for Holden?
• Why does Sally refuse his proposal? Explain Sally’s reasoning—and does Salinger expect this to be the reader’s reasoning also?
• What does Holden say to Sally that effectively ends their date?

3. At the skating rink, Holden proposes that he and Sally run away together. Why does he want to run away? How does he plan to do it? Where does he want to go?
Critical Thinking—Choose ONE of the following prompts to respond to.

APPLYING STANDARDS/JUDGING (Judging according to established personal, professional, or social rules or criteria). Judge Sally’s reasoning in Chapter 17 for not wanting to run away with Holden? Is she the voice of reason here—or is she simply missing something important that Holden—and we—understand?

OR

DISCRIMINATING—RANKING (recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank). Choose a sentence or passage from the reading that stands out for you for ANY reason (maybe it’s funny, important, puzzling—any reason). Be sure to cite its page number—and explain why it’s so important either to the story or to you.
Reading #6: Chapters 18-21 (pgs. 135-166)

Comprehension Questions are OPTIONAL for credit. Critical-Thinking Open Responses are COMPULSORY.

Chapter 18 (125-141)

- How does Jane defend Al Pike against Holden’s criticism that he is a show-off?
- Holden’s address book has three names in it. What does this tell you about Holden?
- How does Holden respond to “the lady sitting next to me” at the movie? How is this response consistent with Holden’s character and conflict?
- What does Holden say he’ll do with the atomic bomb if there is another war?

1. How does Alec, the character in the movie that Holden was watching, lose and then regain his memory? Suggest a connection between this story and Holden’s.

Chapter 19 (141-149)

- What does Holden mean by the word *flit* as used on p. 143?
- What is Luce’s reaction when Holden starts to tell him of his (Holden’s) problems? How does Salinger intend for us to respond to this?
- Why does Holden want Luce to stay and have one more drink?

2. What does Luce’s father do for a living? How could he help Holden, according to Carl Luce and why is this important to the story?

Chapter 20 (pgs. 149-157)

- Give an example from page 149 of something Holden does to show that he is still lonely.
- Describe what Holden must have looked like to the person he met in the men’s room.

3. Central Park.
   a. Why does Holden go to Central Park and what does he drop on the way to the park? Also, what is the significance of both the place and what is dropped?
   b. On pages 154-155, what thoughts (mostly) does Holden have about himself in Central Park?

Chapter 21 (pgs. 157-166)

- Why wasn’t Phoebe sleeping in her room? What does Holden say about kids sleeping? How is this consistent with Holden’s character?
- Briefly describe the movie Phoebe had seen that afternoon. Suggest a meaningful connection between the movie’s plot and Holden’s story.

4. What does Phoebe say she’ll do with the record Holden bought her? Suggest the significance of this gesture of Phoebe’s.
Critical Thinking—Choose ONE of the following prompts to respond to.

**ANALYZING/ORGANIZING** (Separating or breaking a whole into parts to discover their nature, functional and relationships). Why is Phoebe so important to the story—whether you see it as one of Holden's grieving over Allie's death or feeling anxious about becoming an adult?

**OR**

**DISCRIMINATING—RANKING** (recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank). Choose a sentence or passage from the reading that stands out for you for ANY reason (maybe it’s funny, important, puzzling—any reason). Be sure to cite its page number—and explain why it's so important either to the story or to you.
Reading #7: Chapters 22-24 (pgs. 166-193)
Comprehension Questions are OPTIONAL for credit. Critical-Thinking Open Responses are COMPULSORY.

Chapter 22 (pgs. 166-174)

• In answer to Phoebe’s challenge "Name someone you like," who are the first three people that come to Holden's mind? Then, what is the first name he mentions to Phoebe? What is the significance of this first name?
• According to Holden what would be the only good part of being a lawyer? How does this answer reflect on Holden’s dilemma throughout the story?
• What is the correction Phoebe makes to Holden’s saying the song line "If a body catch a body comin’ through the wry"?

1. Who was James Castle and how did Castle’s death affect Holden?

2. What’s the only job that Holden claims he would like to have? Suggest the significance of this choice of Holden’s.

Chapter 23 (pgs. 174-180)

• What did Mr. Antolini do for James Castle?
• What lie does Phoebe tell her mother in order to cover for Holden?
• What does Phoebe want Holden to see her do that week?
• Suggest the significance of the gift that Holden gives to Phoebe as the chapter ends?

3. Why did Holden cry after she gave him the money? List all of the possible reasons that come to mind.

Chapter 24 (pgs. 180-193)

• Why does Richard Kinsella, a student in Holden’s “Oral Expression” class, receive a "D plus"? How does this speak to the nature of novel itself?
• Mr. Antolini warns Holden that he is in danger of having a “fall.” What does he mean here by “fall”?
• How do you read Mr. Antolini’s intentions in his waking up Holden from his sound sleep?

4. Explain the meaning of the quote: “The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one.”
**Critical Thinking—Choose ONE of the following prompts to respond to.**

**ANALYZING/ORGANIZING** (Separating or breaking a whole into parts to discover their nature, functional and relationships). Explore ONE of the following connections: (1) Connect the James Castle story to Holden’s interest in being a “catcher in the rye” OR connect the James Castle story to Mr. Antolini’s s quotation about the immature man and the mature man.

OR

**DISCRIMINATING—RANKING** (recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank). Choose a sentence or passage from the reading that stands out for you for ANY reason (maybe it’s funny, important, puzzling—any reason). Be sure to cite its page number—and explain why it’s so important either to the story or to you.
Reading #8: Chapters 25-26 (pgs. 194-214)
Comprehension Questions are OPTIONAL for credit. Critical-Thinking Open Responses are COMPULSORY.

Chapter 25 (194-213)

• Where is Holden when he thinks he is “more depressed than I ever was in my whole life”?
• What does Holden reconsider regarding Mr. Antolini? How does this suggest Holden’s growth now that the novel is near its end?
• Name specifically five aspects of Holden’s dream about running away.
• What is the content of Holden’s letter to Phoebe? What does this suggest about Holden as the novel is nearing its end?
• What is significant about Holden’s short lesson on the Egyptians to the boys at the museum?
• At the museum how does Holden recognize the approach of Phoebe? Suggest the significance of this.
• When Phoebe meets Holden, what does Phoebe have with her and why does she have it? What is your reading of Phoebe’s intentions?
• Why does Holden change his mind about leaving?
• What is the significance of the weather conditions at the end of the chapter? Where is Holden? Where is Phoebe? Suggest the importance of these positions.

1. What fear grips Holden as he was walking up Fifth Avenue? Whom does he ask for help to overcome this fear? Suggest the significance of this moment. (Find the interesting connection to this moment in the bottom half of page 5.)

2. What is Holden’s reaction to the obscenity (vulgar expression) that he discovers on the wall at Phoebe’s school? Mark the other two places that he sees the expression and how he responds. How are Holden’s responses different? (And what could the difference suggest?)

3. What is the significance Holden’s reaction to Phoebe on the carousel and to the gold ring? How does this reflect Holden’s coming of age?

Chapter 26 (pgs. 213-214)

• Who are the last three people mentioned in the book? Suggest the significance of Holden’s choosing these three characters as the novel ends?

4. What does Holden think he’ll do come September? What does Salinger intend for the reader to understand by this decision?
Critical Thinking—Choose ONE of the following prompts to respond to.

ANALYZING/ORGANIZING (Separating or breaking a whole into parts to discover their nature, functional and relationships). What connects the three people Holden says he’ll “sort of miss”—at the very end of the novel?

OR

DISCRIMINATING—RANKING (recognizing differences and similarities among things or situations and distinguishing carefully as to category or rank). Choose a sentence or passage from the reading that stands out for you for ANY reason (maybe it’s funny, important, puzzling—any reason). Be sure to cite its page number—and explain why it’s so important either to the story or to you.