The Catcher in the Rye

The Catcher in the Rye, by J.D. Salinger, is a book about a lost and depressed young adult, Holden Caulfield. Holden strays from the main point of his story many times, however one of his most telling digressions has to do with his former best friend, Jane, and her habits while playing checkers:

“She wouldn’t move any of her kings. What she’d do, when she’d get a king, she wouldn’t move it. She’d just leave it in the back row. She’d get them all lined up in the row. Then she’d never use them. She just liked the way they looked when they were all in the back row” (Salinger, p. 31-32).

This is a very symbolic quote because it explains the behavior of many of the characters in this book, especially Holden’s. In the same way that Jane holds her kings, her strongest pieces, in the back, Holden holds back some of his strongest qualities. Even his name, Holden, which is not accidental, suggests that he is holding something back. There are innumerable places in the book that show Holden holding back.

Gloves: Protection

The Catcher in the Rye is a novel of digressions. Holden Caulfield constantly brings up seemingly random episodes of various people, things, and places. However, they all play a significant role and relate to the overall story. In the beginning of Chapter 13, Holden imagines an elaborate argument with a student at Pencey, the thief who stole his gloves. Although it may be irrelevant to its direct context, by analyzing each sentence, there are connections made with major aspects of the story. In the diversion, the theme of “phoniness” reappears and also captures
Holden’s personality traits. It reveals his loss and loneliness as well, connected with the symbolic significance of the gloves itself.

The Significance of Falling in 
The Catcher in the Rye

The Catcher in the Rye is a well-known novel in which we are offered a brief first-person look into the life of Holden Caulfield, an intriguing teenager with a heart full of painful memories and a sharp mind full of criticism. During Holden’s narration—an account of a few significant days in his life—he digresses from his tale several times with seemingly irrelevant stories. Although these tangents seem wholly unrelated to the plot, they often have well-disguised meaning hidden behind a façade of amusing stories about this past. One of these innumerable digressions appears only a few pages into the book. Holden is on his way to say goodbye to a teacher after being kicked out of his school, and he is crossing the road. “After I got across the road, I felt like I was sort of disappearing. It was that kind of crazy afternoon, terrifically cold, and so no sun out or anything, and you felt like you disappearing every time you crossed a road (p.5).” Although this passage seems insignificant to the reader at the time, it is in truth a major example of foreshadowing in the story.

Dr. Holden Caulfield

In The Catcher in the Rye, by J.D. Salinger, the difficult life of Holden Caulfield unfolds. Holden is a lazy student who is continually expelled from an array of schools and finally runs away
to New York City. After a horrific experience, the boy returns to his home, seeking comfort with his sister, Phoebe, who relates to her brother the plot of a movie she had seen earlier on the very same day. This film, titled “The Doctor,” is about a “doctor in Kentucky and everything that sticks a blanket over this child’s face that’s a cripple and can’t walk. They send him to jail and everything” (162-3). Indeed, the short description of the film, “The Doctor,” enriches and deepens the reader’s understanding of Holden. Firstly, the doctor’s character can be closely linked to that of Holden, and furthermore, the sick child who must suffocate foreshadows future events in Holden’s life. Finally, the fact that Holden never actually listened to his sister explain the movie plot tells much about Holden’s impatience as well as his limited relationship with his family.

**Melting Away**

**Digressions**, **digressions**, **digressions**… For most reflecting on J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, the first things that come to mind are the endless amounts of digressions throughout the novel. During the book, Holden Caulfield, a troubled teen, takes the reader on a long journey in search of his true self. Whether or not each and every digression that Holden makes is pertinent to his coming of age story is for the reader to decide. Some think that Holden’s vivid descriptions of a funny looking red hunting hat and his *inane* thoughts about ducks in Central Park are just arbitrarily placed in the true plot for sheer amusement. However, if you just as much as peek beyond the surface, you will soon see that everything is in fact there for a reason. There is one instance in particular that leads the reader to believe that every minute detail serves a purpose. Towards the beginning of the novel, Holden reaches his large hands outside into the bitter cold and packs a hunk of newly delivered snow into a single snowball. This snowball may seem rather
trivial to the untrained reader, but it actually plays an incredibly important role in the story and it informs the reader that Holden is headed for a breakdown.