The Catcher in the Rye

Some opening questions:

– Why does this book continue its hold on some people?

– Is Holden still a relevant character in today’s culture? (Is the novel still relevant, or is it outdated?)

– What’s with all of Holden’s digressions? Can we challenge ourselves to make sense out of as many as possible? (Remember, for the novelist, everything is purposeful.)
The Catcher in the Rye

Frame: The Narrator’s Present (1950)
The Narrator’s Past: Flashback
(1949, before Christmas)

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The Catcher in the Rye, Chapter 1: Key Points

Holden’s Character

- Holden’s Sensitivity/Need for Closure
  - saying good-bye
    - “chucking the football around” (4)

- Holden’s Disillusionment
  - D.B.
    - Sold himself to Hollywood
  - Holden hates the movies.
    - Why might someone hate the movies?
  - Pencey
    - The headmaster is a “phony slob” (3)
      - On Selma Thurmer: “she didn’t give you a lot of horse manure about what great guy her father was” (3)
    - “Pencey was full of crooks” (4)
The Catcher in the Rye, Chapter 1: Key Points

Holden’s Character, cont’d

• Some more info on Holden
  – He smokes: “I’m quite a heavy smoker” (5)
    • Was out in California after almost having tuberculosis
  – Comes from a wealthy home
    • Goes to Prep school
    • Comments on the Spencers answering their own door (6)
  – Tall
    • grew six and a half inches last year
“What really knocks me out is a book that, when you’re all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it.”

*Can you think of an author you’d like to talk to?*
The Catcher in the Rye Key Points:

Ch. 2

- Holden sees himself among the losers playing the game, and chooses not to play by the rules.

- Holden is a “man-child”
  - He looks old (tall, gray hair on the right side)
  - He occasionally acts younger than he is (acts 13, or 12)

- His note to Mr. Spencer suggests a nice-guy drop-out.

- He cares about innocent ducks; he’s very distractable (and will likely be throughout the narration)
**The Catcher in the Rye Key Points:**

**Ch. 3**

- **Holden is a liar**
  - “I’m the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life” (16)

- **Holden is smart; has not flunked out because of lack of brains**
  - He loves to read; he’s considered a good writer by one of his teachers.

- **Holden is a hunter**
  - He buys a red hunter’s hat; tells Ackley that he hunts people
  - Turns it backward, like a baseball catcher, pulls it over his eyes
The Catcher in the Rye Key Points:
Ch. 4

• Stradlater is a “secret slob;” perhaps so is Holden somehow

• Holden declares his fondness of Jane Gallagher
  – She doesn’t move her kings
  – He’s anxious
    • Not in the mood to go down to see her
    • Her date with Stradlater makes him “sort of nervous” (he pulls his hunter’s cap down) (34)
• What are your initial responses to all of Holden’s phoniness criticisms, and to his criticisms in general?

• It’s okay, every so often, to lie. Agree or disagree.
The Catcher in the Rye *KEY POINTS*
Ch. 5

- **The Snowball and the Car**
  - Reread the short passage on the bottom of page 36. Why is this scene important?

- **Allie and Holden’s response to his death**
  - Holden writes about Allie’s mitt, which had poems written all over it, in green ink

  - A great kid
    - “the most intelligent member in the family” and “also the nicest, in lots of ways” (38)
  
    - Bright red hair

  - Died of leukemia at eleven years old, when Holden was thirteen

  - Holden “broke all the windows in the garage” the night he died (39)
    - His parents “were going to have” him psychoanalyzed.
The Catcher in the Rye *KEY POINTS*

**Ch. 6**

- **Holden fights with Stradlater, loses.**
  - He hits Stradlater just after he asks him if he gave her “the time” (had sex with her).

  *What is the connection among Jane, Allie, the car in the snow, and the ducks (and even Ernest Morrow’s mother [Ch. 8])?*

**Ch. 7**

- **Holden is lonely**
  - Thoughts of suicide
    - “I felt so lonesome, all of a sudden. I almost wished I was dead” (48)
    - “…I felt like jumping out the window” (48)

- **Holden decides to leave Pencey early...**
  - “Sleep tight, ya’ morons!” (52)

- **...and slips on some peanut shells (52)**
Ch. 8

Holden lies to a schoolmate’s mother on the train to New York.
- Gives a favorable report of her “biggest bastard” son, Ernest Morrow
- Lies about his name, health, family

What are your thoughts on Holden’s lying?
Any lies that are ethical?
The Catcher in the Rye

- *So after twelve chapters now, why do you think Holden is so depressed? Any clues?*

- *Why won’t he call Jane?*

- *Any characters so far you wish would get more time in the novel?*
**The Catcher in the Rye**

**Ch 9 KEY POINTS**

- **Holden is still lonely**
  - Wants to call someone, thinks for twenty minutes (59)
    - D.B.--Hollywood
    - Phoebe--parents
    - Jane--not in the mood
    - Sally Hayes--her mother
    - Carl Luce--didn’t like him

- **Holden is still interested in the ducks**

- **Holden has sex on the brain**
  - What he sees through the window
    - Gray-haired cross-dresser (61)
    - A drunk couple squirting water/liquor at each other
    - Comments on crumby stuff (Reread page 62-3)
  - Not in the mood for Jane,
  - Faith Cavendish--“wasn’t exactly a whore or anything but that didn’t mind doing it once in a while”
The Catcher in the Rye
Chs 10-11 KEY POINTS

• Holden thinks about three females
  – Phoebe--creative, smart, young, innocent
    • “sort of” red hair, short, like Allie’s; ten years old
    • Hazle Weatherfield
      – An orphan detective with a twenty-year-old father who “keeps showing up” (60)
  – The Seattle tourists--superficial (looking for movie stars), too old for Holden
    • The Blonde is some dancer--Bernice Krebs
  – Jane--creative, smart, a combination of innocence and maturity
    • Good athlete--tennis, golf
    • Her stepfather, Mr. Cudahy;
    • and Holden (Reread 78-80)
      – The hand in the movie theater
The Catcher in the Rye

**Ch 12 KEY POINTS**

- **The ducks** *again*
  - Old Horwitz the cabdriver (83)

- **Holden’s judgments at the club—“surrounded by jerks”** (85)
  - Ernie the piano player
  - The funny-looking couple; Joe Yale-looking guy
  - Lillian Simmons and the Navy guy

*Final line: “People are always ruining things for you”* (87)

*Is Holden being fair about his judgments of these people?*
FIRST SNOW — Sister Amanda de Jesus was hit by a snowball tossed by Sister Rosa Elena this week in Spokane, Wash. It was the first time the nuns, visiting from Mexico, had seen snow.
The Catcher in the Rye Ch 13 KEY POINTS

• **Holden is lonely and depressed**
  
  – the walk back to the hotel--41 blocks
    • The hunting cap goes on (“I didn’t give a damn how it looked” [88].)
  
  – Holden thinks he’s a coward, or “partly yellow”
    • “I think maybe I’m just partly yellow an partly the type that doesn’t give much of a damn if they lose their gloves…I never seem to have anything that if I lost it I’d care too much” (89)
  
  – “I almost wished I was dead” (90).

• **Holden is sensitive and innocent**
  
  – He respects the girl’s “Stop.” (See page 92)
  
  – the violin (93)

• **Encounter with Sunny**
  
  – “young as hell,” Holden’s age
  
  – “Sexy was about the last thing I was feeling. I felt much more depressed than sexy” (95)
  
  – The green dress (96)
The Catcher in the Rye Ch 14 KEY POINTS

- **Holden is depressed and “talks” to Allie**
  - apologizes for B.B. gun trip (99)

- **Christianity/Religion**
  - Holden is “sort of an atheist”; has trouble praying
  - criticizes the Disciples
  - Favorite character: the lunatic who cuts himself (99)
    - What does this suggest?
      - If Holden can’t protect the innocent (i.e., save the world), he wants to hurt himself.

- **Holden hits the bottom--Maurice and Sunny**
  - gets punched over five dollars--*Why doesn’t Holden just give in?* (103)
  - Cries
  - has violent thoughts
    - Imagines being shot, then shooting Maurice, then being saved by...Jane.
  - considers suicide (104)
The Catcher in the Rye Ch 15 KEY POINTS

• **A New Day: Holden makes contact**
  – (“not in the mood” for Jane) makes a date with Sally Hayes
  
  *Why does Holden choose to call Sally over Jane?*
  – meets nuns, talks literature
    • *Romeo and Juliet*—Mercutio is Holden’s favorite
    • An interesting contact with Catholicism

• **Info on Holden’s parents**
  – dad is wealthy
  – mom hasn’t “felt too healthy” since Allie’s death

• **Holden speaks on status and suitcases**
  – “It’s really hard to be roommates with people if your suitcases are better than theirs” (109)
  – “Goddam money. It always ends up making you blue as hell” (113)
The Catcher in the Rye

How about if I were coming through the rye?!
Coming Through the Rye, by Robert Burns
O, Jenny's a' weet, poor body;
Jenny's seldom dry;
She draiglet a' her petticoatie
Coming thro' the rye.

Chorus:
Coming thro' the rye, poor body,
Coming thro' the rye,
She draiglet a' her petticoatie
Coming thro' the rye.

Gin a body meet a body
Coming thro' the rye,
Gin a body kiss a body -
Need a body cry?

Gin a body meet a body
Coming thro' the glen,
Gin a body kiss a body -
Need the warld ken?
Ch 16 Key Points: Holden feels less depressed

• Holden continues thinking about the nuns
  – “That’s what I liked about those nuns. You could tell...they never went anywhere swanky for lunch” (114).

• Holden wants to buy a record for Phoebe, “Little Shirley Beans” (Estelle Fletcher, 1929?)
  – “about a little kid that wouldn’t go out of the house because two of her front teeth were out and she was ashamed to” (114).

• The title of the book is introduced--
  Holden sees the little boy singing the song (115)
  – the song, “Comin' through the Rye” introduces the title but the boy sings the words differently
  – Walking in the street, beside the curb; “cars zoomed by, brakes screeched...parents paid no attention”
  – “It made me feel not so depressed any more.”
Ch 16 (cont’d) Key Points: Holden feels less depressed

- **Finally, Holden calls Jane!** (But her mother answers and he hangs up.) (116)
  
- **Holden hates actors.** (He hates plays less than movies.) (117)
  - “They never act like people. They just think they do.”

- **Holden looks for Phoebe and meets some nice kids.**
  - “God, I love it when a kid’s nice and polite when you tighten their skate for them or something” (119).

- **Holden remembers the safety of the Museum of Natural History and takes out his hunting hat**
  - “the only nice, dry, cozy place in the world” (120)
  - “The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody’d move...Nobody’d be different. The only thing that would be different would be you” (121).
  - Holden walks there but at the end of the chapter, he doesn’t feel like going in.
Ch 17 Key Points: Holden’s Date with Sally

• **First, Harris Macklin, the whistler**
  - “So I don’t know about bores…(M)abye they’re secretly all terrific whistlers or something. Who the hell knows? Not me” (124).

• **Holden says he loves Sally in the cab.**
  - “It was a lie, of course, but the thing is, I meant it when I said it. I’m crazy. I swear to God I am” (125)

• **The date:**
  - A play with the Lunts at the Biltmore
    - about “five hundred thousand years in the life of this one old couple” (125)
    - Sally’s phony conversation with George during intermission and after the play
  - Ice Skating at Radio City Music Hall
Ch 17 (cont’d) Key Pts: Holden’s Confession to Sally at the Restaurant by the Skating Rink

- **Holden shares his problem, his frustrations, with Sally (130-131; 133)**
  - “Hey, Sally...Did you ever get fed up?”
  - Sally: “‘Don’t shout, please.’ Which was very funny, because I wasn’t even shouting” (130)
  - “I’m in bad shape. I’m in lousy shape” (130)

- **Holden has an idea to “get the hell out of here.”**
  - Go to New England and “live somewhere with a brook and all...and later on, we could get married” (132)
  - “Stop screaming at me please.”

- **Sally says wait; to Holden, waiting would be entirely different.**
  - “We’d have to go downstairs in elevators with suitcases and stuff...It wouldn’t be the same at all” (133)

- **The date ends with “You give me a royal pain in the ass” and a noisy laugh.**
  - “The terrible part, though, is that I meant it when I asked her...I swear to God I’m a madman” (134)
Ch 18 Key Points

- Holden *again* calls Jane (to ask her dancing)--no answer.
  - Al Pike and Bob Robinson
    - “The trouble with girls is...if they like a boy...they’ll say he has an inferiority complex (if he’s a bastard), and if they don’t like him, they’ll say he’s conceited (even if he’s a nice guy) (136).

- Calls Carl Luce (they’ll meet at the Wicker Bar at 10:00 p.m.)
  - On three others in his phone book: Jane, his father’s office, and Mr. Antolini

- The kettle-drum player (Jesus would’ve liked him)
  - “he never looks bored when he’s doing it” (138).

- **What to make of the plot of the movie Holden sees** (138-139)
  - Alec has two personalities—loses his memory; with two women in his life
  - “All I can say is, don’t see it if you don’t want to puke all over yourself” (139).
  - The phony woman sitting beside Holden--crying at the movie, being mean to her kid

- D.B. was in the Army, “landed on D-Day and all”
  - He hated the Army and the war
Ch 19 Key Points: Holden Meets Carl Luce at the Wicker Bar

- ("Flits"—Holden’s comments on homosexuals)

- Holden’s can’t get someone to listen: “I need your advice. I’m in a terrific—” (144).
  - People aren’t listening to him (Mr. Spencer, the cabdrivers, Sally, Luce)

- Carl Luce sees Holden as immature
  - “When the hell are you going to grow up?” (146) (Luce’s pretentiousness, however, shows his immaturity)
  - “Your mind is immature” (147).

- Luce’s advice: See a psychoanalyst.
  - “(H)e’d help you to recognize the patterns of your mind” (148).

- Holden begs Luce to stay: “Please, I’m lonesome as hell. No kidding” (149)

- Carl Luce is compared to Holden
  - both are hypocritical
  - both are confused about adulthood
Ch 20 Key Points

• Holden is drunk at the bar (“could hardly see straight (150)
  • He again fantasizes about being wounded--”the bullet in my guts again”

• He feels like calling Jane, but then again chooses Sally (150)

• Another emotional low: he is soaking wet, drunk in the bathroom, then
crying in the hatcheck room (152-3)
  • “I was crying and all. I don’t know why, but I was. I guess it was because I
    was feeling so damn depressed and lonesome” (153)

• Something terrible: Holden drops Phoebe’s record on the way to the park
  (154). A metaphor?
  • He keeps the pieces, “didn’t feel like throwing them away”

• The ducks once again: lake is “partly frozen and partly not
  frozen; no ducks” (154)

• Holden thinks about death--his own and Allie’s (155)
  • Holden mentions he missed Allie’s funeral while at the hospital for his
    hurting his hand.
Ch 21 Key Points: Holden Sneaks Home, Sees Phoebe in first of Three Chapters

- Phoebe is beautifully asleep in D.B.’s room

- The importance of the movie that Phoebe sees (162-3)

- Innocence is protected (162)

- Phoebe keeps the broken record pieces (164)

- Phoebe doesn’t listen to Holden (165)
  - She puts a pillow over her head., so as not to listen to Holden’s reasons for getting kicked out of school
“When a body meets a body comin’ through the rye”
Coming Through the Rye, by Robert Burns

O, Jenny's a' weet, poor body;
  Jenny's seldom dry;
She draiglet a' her petticoatie
Coming thro' the rye.

Chorus:

Coming thro' the rye, poor body,
  Coming thro' the rye,
She draiglet a' her petticoatie
Coming thro' the rye.

Gin a body meet a body
  Coming thro' the rye,
Gin a body kiss a body -
  Need a body cry?

Gin a body meet a body
  Coming thro' the glen,
Gin a body kiss a body -
  Need the warld ken?
Chapter 22 Key Points

• What Holden likes ("the trouble was, I couldn’t concentrate so hot" (169))
  – The two nuns and James Castle
    • James Castle’s death has an impact on Holden (Reread p. 170)
      – “wrists as big as pencils”
      – What did they do to him? How, why did he die?
  – Allie and talking with Phoebe (171)

• What Holden wants to be
  – a lawyer (172)--so he can save people
    • “How do you know you weren’t being a phony? The trouble was, you wouldn’t.”
  – a “catcher in the rye,” a misunderstanding that reveals his chief problem (Reread 173)

• Holden’s challenge: he is an idealist and wants to protect innocence. *How do you keep kids from falling?*
Chapter 23 Key Points

• **Mr. Antolini**
  – Carried James Castle to the infirmary; “He didn’t even give a damn if his coat got all bloody” (174)

• **Phoebe lies**
  – how to make yourself have a fever (176)
  – *she’s* the smoker (Mom’s 1950’s response [177])

• **Phoebe makes Holden cry (Read 179)**

• **Holden gives Phoebe his red hunting hat just before he leaves (180)**

• **Holden’s parents are not involved; he “almost wished” they caught him at the house (180)**
  – This is a story of the *absence* of support; nobody is there for Holden
Chapter 24 Key Points: Holden Visits Mr. Antolini

- A digression on digressions--Holden failed Oral Expression at Pencey--reveals something about the novel itself
  - Holden likes digressions: “It’s more interesting and all” (183)
  - Richard Kinsella (184)
  - See bottom 184: “But what I mean is…”

- Mr. Antolini
  - counsels Holden
    - Holden is in danger of a “fall” (186, 187)
    - “The mark of an immature man/mature man…” (188)
    - Once you figure it out, you’ll have to apply yourself at school, because you are a student, in love with knowledge (189)
    - You’re not the first person “confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior” (189)
  - confuses Holden
    - touches Holden’s head (bottom 191)
Fuck you.

- What are your earliest memories of learning this expression?

- Why is it still today such a powerful one?

- Does it upset you to hear younger kids use it?
  - At what age do you think it’s okay to begin using the word or expression?
From a Japanese department store, 2012
Frame: The Narrator’s Present (1950)
The Narrator’s Past: Flashback (1949, before Christmas)

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Chapter 25 Key Points

• Holden has second thoughts about leaving Mr. Antolini’s (195)
  – “Maybe he was only patting my head just for the hell of it.”

• Holden falls:
  1. He feels he may have cancer, feels like vomiting, has trouble swallowing
  2. (“something very spooking started happening”) He is gripped by a fear while crossing the street (Read from the bottom of 197)
     • “I had this feeling that I’d never get to the other side of the street. I thought I’d just go down, down, down, and nobody’d ever see me again.”
     “Allie, don’t let me disappear” (198)

• See page 5...

3. He passes out in the museum bathroom (204)

• Holden decides to go West (198)
  • Get a job at a filling station
  • Pretend to be a deaf mute--no more conversations
  • Build a log cabin near the woods
  • Cook his own food
  • Meet a beautiful deaf mute girl (no longer Jane)
Holden sees “Fuck you” three times

1. (at school) rubs it out (201)
   - Worries about the children who see it

2. (at school) scratched on and can’t rub it out (202)
   - “If you had a million years to do it in, you couldn’t rub out even half the “Fuck you” signs in the world. It’s impossible.”

3. (at the museum) written in red crayon; chooses to leave it (204)
   - Considers that even on his tombstone will be written, “Fuck you.”
Other points

• Not in the mood to call Jane.

• At the museum
  • Holden meets two boys and uses his knowledge of the Egyptian mummies (Remember his essay for Mr. Spencer’s class (p. 11))

• Phoebe is ready to go with him (Is she serious, or trying to trick him?); Holden has to stay (206, 207)

• **the carrousel:** Holden lets Phoebe try for the ring (211)
  - “If they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it.”

• **the red hat again** (212, 213)--Phoebe returns the hat
  - “My hunting hat really gave me quite a lot of protection, in a way, but I got soaked anyway. I didn’t care, though.”

• Rain (212)

• And he never does get in touch with Jane.
Mr. Antolini’s Note (Ottava Rima)

From Pencey Prep you’ve just been tossed, and now you’re scared to tell your folks. It’s not your fault, you say—you’re lost. So hide behind your crappy jokes and go flunk out; keep getting sauced, and why—because your brother croaks? Or it’s the school that you’re enrolled in? Just get your act together, Holden.

So Sally’s cute but half insane, Laverne’s a snob and Sunny’s rude. It’s true, you’ve always said it’s Jane, but then—you’re never in the mood. I close my ears when you complain: you’ve got to change your attitude. So stand up straight and don’t be foldin’, and get your act together, Holden.

You can’t catch all the kids who fall or stop the ones from getting sick, and all those bad words in the hall can’t be erased. Just let ‘em stick. You’ll get no help from alcohol; to see it sober—that’s the trick—and leap out for that ring that’s golden: it’s grow-up time—you know that, Holden.

Alan Reinstein, 2006
Chapter 26 Key Points

- The story frame is completed.

- Holden’s future is uncertain.

- Holden “sort of” misses everybody: Stradlater, Ackley, even Maurice.