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**SOME NOTES FOR LITERATURE STUDY GUIDE TO THE NOVEL  
*THE CATCHER IN THE RYE* BY J.D. SALINGER**

The course in English Literature is designed to popularise the study of English Literature as well as to get students reading works of fiction and analysing them. It offers a variety of fiction from the English-speaking world by well-known authors, both classic and modern.

One of the aims of the course is to teach students to think independently about the text being studied. It provides students with critical and creative skills. The course typically allows students to form their opinions and ideas and helps them to acquire skills of close critical analysis, the knowledge and understanding of context that will enable learners to study, appreciate, and above all enjoy literary texts. The course in English Literature focuses equally on the literature and language sides. The teacher's task is to help students in finding and choosing and in getting the most from literary texts.

The students are suggested to read one of the best books of the twentieth century list *The Catcher in the Rye* written by J.D. Salinger. The novel was written in late 1940s – early 1950s in New York and was published on 16 July 1951 by Little, Brown of Boston. The novel became an instant bestseller in the United States. *The Catcher in the Rye* received mixed critical receptions in the USA and Britain. It was attacked for its formidably excessive use of amateur swearing and coarse language. On the other hand, many reviewers were very impressed and Salinger's novel was the Book-of-the-Month Club's selection for July 1951. On the day the novel was published the *New York Times* called it 'an unusually brilliant novel'. The *Chicago Tribune* said that it was 'engaging and believable' and remarked that it was 'full of right observation and sharp insight' [2].

To make analysis of the work of fiction effective the following components should be taken into consideration: the description of life experience and a literary biography of the writer, the literary and historical background to the work, a summary of the text, a glossary of the text, commentaries to help plan work and study effectively, a specimen essay, and suggestions for further reading.

It is important to consider the part played by each of the characters in the story, their chief characteristics and examine the way they interrelate with the other characters as well as the way they are portrayed by the author. Here are some questions that can be asked: if characters are fully rounded portraits or rather one-dimensional, if they are believable as characters, if the course of events see them develop, if the reader's opinion of them alters over time.

The next step is to analyse how the story is organized in terms of the things that take place and the way in which these events work out in the conclusion. You might think about whether the ending is satisfying or not and, if not, why not. In considering the plot students should be able to discuss the relevance of any single episode to the overall development of the story.

Analysing the structure of the text it is essential to pay attention to the way the story is told and to consider how this helps our understanding of characters and events. *The Catcher in the Rye* is narrated in a subjective style in the form of Holden's first-person narrative, following his exact thought processes. The story that he tells takes place over a period of four days from the middle of a Saturday afternoon just a few days prior to the Christmas holidays. However, the events that he recounts are on many levels of time as he recalls several incidents from his past life. The story dispenses with strict chronology and, instead, follows the movements of Holden's chance reminiscences and arbitrary observations. Thus the use of the flashback technique is the most significant narrative device in the book as it allows us to

see the way in which Holden's disorganised thoughts and memories reveal his character and present plight.

One of the aims of the course consists in building on our reading and analytical skills that are why we shouldn't disregard preparing detailed summaries for every chapter. It is advisable to make your own synopsis of each chapter as you read it. This helps a student to retain the story in greater detail. In the first chapter Holden introduces himself to the reader. He gives a few very brief details about his family and tells of his expulsion from Pencey, an exclusive private school for young boys. In this chapter Holden's most striking characteristic, his sincerity becomes apparent. He constantly attempts to see people and things as they really are and is contemptuous of everything that is false and dishonest. Indeed, *phony*, which means *insincere* or *hypocritical*, is the key term in his evaluation of his experience. For example, he refers to Thurmer, Pencey's headmaster, as a *phony slob* and is scornful towards his brother, D.B., who has squandered his true talent in order to make a lot of money writing scripts for Hollywood films.

Speaking about characterization we should mention that the story is built around one character (Holden Caulfield) as he introduces the reader to a wide variety of people in the course of his tale, but their existence is of significance only in so far as it affects Holden. Students speak about the protagonist Holden Caulfield. Salinger depicts a psychological portrait of Holden. The writer reveals complicated psychological insights of the main character by taking a view of Holden's prep-school life. Holden's reminiscences and observations are short and to the point. Holden is sometimes, but not for long, a little bitter, and it may be he has a tendency to generalize from too little evidence, but he has seen and done a lot for a 16-year-old. Occasionally Holden gives the reader an assessment of himself. Holden has many positive virtues. He likes small children because they have not been corrupted by the world and his fantastic desire to be 'the catcher in the rye' reflects his wish to preserve their innocence.

Salinger's rendering of teen-age speech is characterized by the unconscious humour, the repetitions, the emphasis, the slang and profanity. Critical reviews agree that the novel accurately reflected the teenage colloquial speech of the time. Taking a critical look at the words of the English language in the novel it is easy to notice some frequently appeared words and phrases: *phony* – superficial, hypocritical, and pretentious, *that killed me* – I found that hilarious or astonishing, *flit* – homosexual, *crummy* – inadequate, insufficient, and / or disappointing, *snowing* – sweet-talking, *I got a bang out of that* – I found it hilarious or exciting, *to shoot the bull* – to have a conversation containing false elements, *to chew the fat* – to small-talk.

Students are offered some notes of literary criticism, stimulating ideas and thought-provoking questions. The reading will require studying and analyzing passages, relating texts to their cultural, social, historical and political contexts. Commentaries on *The Catcher in the Rye* represent an important part of its analysis during the lesson. First of all it should be noted that the work is a literary landmark. It acquired cult status amongst American college students. It had also become a text for academic scrutiny and was proclaimed as American classic.

*The Catcher in the Rye* has had significant cultural influence. The novel is very much a product of the 1940s. It was conceived during the last years of the Second World War and was published in the middle of the Korean war.

In the context of the contemporary culture the novel illustrates the 'youthquake' of the late 1950s as a result of the 'babyboom' of the immediate postwar years. The author created in Holden Caulfield a hero whose dislike of regimentation and distrust of authority gave America one of its models of dissent against the ideologies that lay behind US military activities in Asia in the postwar years.

Holden's status as a symbol of individualism for America youth was largely confined to the middle and upper income groups with backgrounds broadly similar to his own. His is a very specific social world with its own traditions, codes and practices. The Caulfields, though only vaguely portrayed as a unit, are recognisably a financially well-off, New York nuclear family. Pencey is a kind of single-sex boarding school that, from the nineteenth century, educated and socialised young males of the business and professional classes. Such schools were the transmitters of ideals and values of an élite in American life. Caulfield's central objection to Pencey is that its spirit of communal care and solidarity is really a mask that disguises its propagation of the selfish, competitive ethos of American life with its power élites and exclusive clubs.

Holden is responding to a complex adult society in which innocence and idealism cannot survive. Salinger's novel is a lament for inevitable loss of innocence and to that extent is a very American book. In literary history the novel cemented its reputation as the defining novel of teenage angst and alienation.

### Literature

1. Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye* / Сэлинджер, Д. Над пропастью во ржи: книга для чтения на англ. яз. – СПб.: Антология, КАРО, 2009. – 288 с.
2. Donnelly, B. York notes on *The Catcher in the Rye*: J.D. Salinger. Notes by Brian Donnelly / B. Donnelly. – Harlow, England: Longman York Press, 1995. – 58 p.