

The Catcher in the Rye – Summary

Chapter 1

Holden Caulfield writes his story from a rest home to which he has been sent for therapy. He begins to tell the story of his breakdown, beginning with his departure from Pencey Prep, a school in Agerstown, Pennsylvania.

After failing four of his five subjects he has been forbidden to return to the school after the fall term. The Sunday before Christmas holiday begins, Holden stands on Thomsen Hill overlooking the football field, where Pencey plays its annual match against Saxon Hall. Holden has no interest in the game. He is the manager of the school's fencing team and is supposed to be in New York for a meet, but he has lost team's equipment on the subway, forcing everybody to return early.

Holden is full of contempt for the prep school, but he looks for a way to "say goodbye" to it. Holden walks away from the game to go say goodbye to Mr Spencer, a former history teacher.

Chapter 2

Holden visits old Spencer, his former history teacher. Holden has recently been kicked out of school and old Spencer wants to see him for the last time. Holden enters and sits down on Spencer's hard bed and they start to discuss Holden's efforts at school, which have turned out not satisfactory. Then old Spencer takes out one of Holden's history tests and starts reading it out to Holden and lectures him. At the same time Holden thinks about the ducks and where they go in winter. He also thinks about Mr. Haas, the headmaster of Elkton Hills, who he thinks "was the phoniest bastard I ever met in my life". (19) Old Spencer wants to help Holden, but he can't stand it any longer and refuses to stay for a hot chocolate. Finally he leaves.

Cyril Khan

Chapter 3

In chapter 3 Holden's sarcasm becomes evident: "I can be quite sarcastic when I'm in the mood". (28) He hates fake people, even though he himself seems to be a fake person sometimes, too. He also admits to be "the most terrific liar". (22) Then he speaks about Ossenburger, a former student at Pencey Prep who has made a fortune in the discount funeral business.

Reading Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa*, Holden wishes he could call the various authors of the books he reads. He would like to talk to them because they are the only ones who can rescue him from his mental isolation.

He is interrupted by Robert Ackley who enters Holden's room. Obviously, Holden is not very fond of Ackley, who is very untidy and exhibits disgusting habits and poor hygiene. Ackley calls Holden a child because he sometimes acts as if he was one. Then they talk about the red hunting hat which Holden sarcastically calls a "people shooting hat". (30) Finally, Stradlater, his roommate, enters.

Holden never feels comfortable at Pencey. He feels ostracized by his parents, like someone who has never been loved. He wants to prove to his parents that he is able to be good at school to gain their love but he fails. That weighs heavily on him so he feels even worse because he knows that he will also stand alone in the future.

Milena Gauch

Chapter 4

Holden goes to the bathroom with Stradlater. Stradlater stands in front of the mirror and shaves. He has a problem because he has to write an English composition, but at the same

time he has a date. After a short discussion Holden agrees to write the composition for him.

Holden asks about the date and he learns that Stradlater is taking out a girl he knows, Jean Gallagher. Holden is worried about her, knowing Stradlater's attitude towards girls. Jane Gallagher used to live next door to him. They are friends and used to play together. He likes her very much, but it is a secret. Holden tells Stradlater every little detail about Jane and the things they have done: "I used to play checkers with her all the time. [...] She wouldn't move any of her kings." (41) But Stradlater is not interested at all. Finally Stradlater is ready and he leaves. Holden returns to his room and feels depressed. Once again Ackley comes in.

Gisela Strässle

Chapter 5

It's Saturday night and the pupils are eating steak and mashed potatoes for dinner at Pencey. Outside it is raining. Since Holden doesn't have a date tonight he goes to eat hamburgers in Agerstown with his friends, Mal Brossard, and Ackley.

When they come back to Pencey, Holden and Ackley still talk for a while, but then Holden chases him out of his room in order to write the composition Stradlater asked him to write. He writes about the baseball mitt of his two years younger brother Allie. The mitt is very special because it has poems written all over.

Holden remembers a lot of moments he spent with redheaded Allie. He calls him his favourite member of the family because he is the nicest and most intelligent of all. That's why it is even worse for Holden, when Allie dies of leukemia three years previously. That night he breaks all the windows in the garage, so they want to have him psychoanalyzed.

At about 10.30 he finishes the composition and looks out of the window for a while before he goes to bed.

Rahel Büchi

Chapter 6

Stradlater returns late from his date with Jane. Holden is worried about Jane because he knows that Stradlater is unscrupulous and a womanizer. When Holden wants to know what they have done all the time, Stradlater replies that they have only been in the car.

After reading the essay about the baseball glove Stradlater gets angry. He says that this is not the topic he has asked him to write an essay about. Holden feels insulted and provokes Stradlater by smoking in the room and calling him a moron. Finally they fight and Holden ends up with his face covered with blood.

Nathalie Bergsma

Holden waits for Stradlater to come back from his date with Jane. He questions him about the date and wants to know if she still keeps all her kings in the back row. Stradlater says that they have only been in Ed Banky's (basketball coach at Pencey) car. Holden is angry because he knows how Stradlater treats girls.

Holden has agreed to write a composition for Stradlater while he was away. However, the composition is about the wrong topic. He lights a cigarette to annoy Stradlater and he also calls him a moron. Then Stradlater gets very angry and they start to fight. Holden loses the fight as Stradlater is much stronger and Holden a pacifist.

Raphael von Wyl

Chapter 7

Holden enters Ackley's room. Ackley wants to know why Holden's face is all covered with blood and what the fight has been about. Holden says that the fight has been about Ackley, but then he admits he is only kidding.

After a while he tries to fall asleep in Ely's bed, but he cannot stop imagining Stradlater fooling around with Jane. He wakes Ackley and talks with him some more. He asks about

the routine of joining a monastery. Ackley is annoyed by the conversation. He wants to sleep as he has to go to the Mass early in the morning.

Holden leaves the room and decides that he will leave for New York instead of waiting until Wednesday. He starts packing and feels very depressed: "My nerves were shot. They really were." (67). He remembers his mother buying ice skates for him and he realises that he will disappoint her once again. Finally he counts his money and while leaving he yells: "Sleep tight, ya morons!" (68)

Marco Elmiger

Martina Henzi

Chapter 8

Holden walks the entire way to the train station and catches a late train to New York. At Trenton, an attractive older woman gets on and sits next to him. She turns out to be the mother of a classmate, Ernest Morrow. He dislikes Ernest immensely but tells extravagant lies about him to his mother, claiming that he is the most popular boy on campus and would have been elected class president if he had let the other boys nominate him. Holden tells her his own name is Rudolph Schmidt, which is actually the school janitor's name. When she asks why he is leaving Pencey early, Holden claims to be returning to New York for a brain tumour operation.

Chapter 9

When Holden arrives at Penn Station he wants to call somebody up, but then he doesn't remember anyone to talk to, so he leaves the phone booth and takes a cab to the Edmont Hotel. He tries to make conversation with the driver, asking him where the ducks in the Central Park lagoon go in winter, but the driver is uninterested.

In his room, he observes other hotel guests on the opposite side of the building. He thinks they are perverts, because a man dresses in women's clothes and in another room a couple is squirting water to their faces.

After that he wants to phone Jane Gallagher, but then, being quite horny, he decides to call Faith Cavendish, a girl he doesn't really know. He wants to take her out for a cocktail, however, she refuses offering to him to meet tomorrow.

Christopher Fergg

Chapter 10

Holden is alone and he would like to phone his sister Phoebe, but he can't phone her at this time of night. So he thinks about his family, mostly about his sister who he likes very much. She is described to look quite similar to Allie.

Then he goes downstairs to the Lavender room, the hotel's night club. Pretending to be twenty-one he tries to order a drink but is only given a Coke.

At a table next to him he discovers three girls: the blonde one is quite pretty, the others are fat. He feels like dancing, so he goes to ask the blonde. They dance, but the girls ignore Holden, because they are looking for a movie actor called Peter Lorre. Holden gets angry because of that and tells the girls that he has only just seen Garry Cooper leaving the club. The girls are very excited at first but then disappointed to miss the movie star. Finally they leave.

Zina Ganic

In this chapter Holden speaks about his sister Phoebe. In Holden's opinion she is very smart and he holds her as an archetype of innocence. After this characterisation of his sister Holden goes to the Lavender Room, the hotel's night club. He meets three girls at the age of thirty. He asks them to dance with him, one at the time, and finally the blonde one gets up and they start dancing. Holden is very surprised about the woman, because she is dancing very well and he almost falls in love with her. After a while he also dances with the other two women, one at a time, and then he sits down and attempts to begin a conver-

sation with the ladies. But they do not want to make a conversation or they do not have the intelligence to do so. So in the end Holden is very disappointed about this and leaves the Lavender Room.

Emanuel Järmann

Chapter 11

In the lobby, Holden sits down on a chair and thinks of Jane Gallagher. He remembers how they have got to know each other and how they have spent time together playing tennis and golf every day.

He remembers how they were playing checkers at Jane's home. One day, Jane's alcoholic stepfather came out to the porch and asked for cigarettes. Jane didn't answer and when he left, she started to cry. Holden didn't know why, but then he kissed her all over her face except her mouth, trying to comfort her. Apart from that, their physical relationship was mild, but they used to hold hands constantly. When you held Jane's hand, Holden remembers, "all you knew was, you were happy. You really were." (103) He tries to explain the strange relationship between him and Jane. After thinking of her, he feels depressed at this place. He isn't tired, so he decides to grab a taxi.

Reto Zelger

Elias Sidler

Chapter 12

Holden takes a cab to a Greenwich Village night club called Ernie's spot. He starts a conversation with the driver, Horwitz, about the ducks (and the fish) in Central Park, but then the driver suddenly gets angry. Holden asks him to join him for a drink, but Horwitz only asks why he isn't home in bed. So he goes to Ernie's alone and listens to Ernie playing the piano. The music makes him feel depressed. He sits alone at the table and listens to the conversation next to him which he finds depressing and phony. Then Lillian Simmons, a girl D.B. used to date, and a Navy guy enter. They have a short conversation and finally Holden leaves.

Jeanine Zihlmann

Holden takes a cap. He asks the cap driver, whose name is Horwitz, where the ducks go in winter. Horwitz does not know it and he gets angry.

Holden gets out in front of Ernie's and enters. He orders Scotch and Soda and sits down at a table.

Suddenly a girl called Lillian Simmons enters the night club. She asks Holden how his brother D.B. is. She knows Holden's brother since they were together for some time in the past. Holden does not like her and her date, a Navy guy, at all and so he feels urged to leave the club.

Petra Aschwanden

Chapter 13

Holden walks back to the hotel. While walking he thinks about his gloves, which were stolen at Pencey. He imagines a confrontation with the unknown thief. As he arrives at the hotel, the whole lobby is empty, so he takes the elevator up to his room. The elevator operator asks Holden, if he is interested in having a good time. He would organise a prostitute for Holden for "five bucks a throw [or] for fifteen bucks the whole night". (119) Holden feels depressed but he agrees. He goes to his room and gets nervous, because he is still a virgin. Then the girl called Sunny arrives. Sunny takes her dress off and wants to have sex with Holden, but Holden does not want to and says, that he cannot, because he had an operation on his "clavichord". Sunny gets angry so Holden gives her five bucks, although they have only talked. Finally she leaves the room.

Angela Elmiger

Holden walks back to the hotel, because he does not feel like taking a taxi, but it is very cold, so he puts his red hunting hat on. On his way he thinks about him being a yellow guy, which means he wants to do something but he does not dare to. Holden feels very depressed and he wants to be dead.

Back in the hotel, the elevator guy asks him, if he is interested in having a good time with a girl for only five bucks. Holden affirms, because when he is depressed he cannot think. Holden is still a virgin; that makes him very nervous. He feels more depressed than sexy when the girl comes into his room and he does not want to have sex anymore. He only wants to talk with her, but she is “sore as hell” (127) and leaves his room.

Tanja Scheuber

Chapter 14

Holden sits in his hotel room and smokes for a while. He remembers an incident shortly before Allie's death when he excluded Allie from a BB-gun game—he still feels guilty for having left Allie out. Eventually, he goes to bed. He feels like praying, but his distaste for religion prevents him from doing it. Suddenly, there is a knock at his door. In his pyjamas, Holden opens the door to face the elevator operator, Maurice, who has returned with Sunny to collect the extra five dollars Sunny demanded. Holden tries to refuse, but Maurice pins him against a wall while Sunny takes the money from his wallet. Maurice snaps his finger into Holden's groin, and Holden starts to insult him in response. Maurice slugs Holden in the stomach and leaves him crumpled on the floor. Holden imagines himself as a movie character, taking his revenge on Maurice after having been plugged in the gut with a gangster's bullet. Finally, he manages to get into bed and go to sleep.

Chapter 15

The next morning, Holden calls Sally Hayes, a friend from one of his former schools, and makes a date with her for later that afternoon. He checks out of the hotel and leaves his bags in a locker at Grand Central Station. He worries about losing his money and mentions that his father frequently gets angry when Holden loses things. He also describes his mother a bit, she “hasn't felt too healthy since my brother Allie died.” (140) Holden worries that the news of his expulsion will particularly distress his fragile mother, for whom he seems to care a great deal.

Holden goes to eat breakfast at a little sandwich bar, where he meets two nuns who are moving to Manhattan to teach in a school. Holden thinks about the superficial money-driven world of the prep school he has just left. Then he talks to one of the nuns about Romeo and Juliet. Despite his earlier expression of distaste for organized religion, he forces them to take ten dollars as a charitable contribution. After they leave, although he realizes he needs money to pay for his date with Sally, he begins to regret having given only ten dollars. He concludes that money always makes people depressed.

Chapter 16

After breakfast, Holden goes for a walk. He thinks about the selflessness of the nuns and can't imagine anyone he knows being so generous and giving. He heads down Broadway to buy a record called “Little Shirley Beans” for Phoebe. He likes the record because, although it is for children, it is sung by a black blues singer who makes it sound raunchy, not cute. He thinks about Phoebe, whom he considers to be a wonderful girl because, although she's only ten, she always understands what Holden means when he talks to her. He sees an oblivious little boy walking in the street, singing, “If a body catch a body coming through the rye.” The innocence of the scene cheers him up, and he decides to call Jane, although he hangs up when her mother answers the phone. In preparation for his date with Sally, he buys theater tickets to a show called *I Know My Love*, which stars the Lunts.

Holden wants to see Phoebe, and he goes to look for her in the park because he remembers that she often roller-skates there on Sundays. He meets a girl who knows Phoebe. At first, she tells him that his sister is on a school trip to the Museum of Natural History, but

then she remembers that the trip was the previous day. Nevertheless, Holden walks to the museum, remembering his own class trips. He focuses on the way life is frozen in the museum's exhibits: models of Eskimos and Indians stand as though petrified and birds hang from the ceiling, seemingly in mid-flight. He remarks that every time he went to the museum, he felt that he had changed, while the museum had stayed exactly the same.

Chapter 17

At two o'clock, Holden goes to meet Sally at the Biltmore Hotel; she is late but looks very attractive, so he immediately forgives her tardiness. They make out in the taxi on the way to the theatre. At the play, the actors annoy Holden because, like Ernie the piano player, they are almost too good at what they do and seem full of themselves. During intermission, Sally irritates Holden by flirting with a pretentious boy from Andover, another prep school, but he nonetheless agrees to take her ice-skating at "Radio City" (Radio City Music Hall is part of Rockefeller Center, where there is an ice-skating rink) after the show. While skating, Holden speculates that Sally only wanted to go ice-skating so she could wear a short skirt and show off her "cute ass," but he admits that he finds it attractive. When they take a break and sit down indoors, Holden begins to unravel. Oscillating between shouting and hushed tones, he rants about all the "phonies" at his prep schools and in New York society, and talks about how alienated he feels. He becomes even more crazy and impetuous, saying that he and Sally should run away together and escape from society, living on their own in a cabin. When she points out that his dreams are ridiculous, he becomes more and more agitated. The quarrel builds until Holden calls Sally a "royal pain in the ass," and she begins to cry. Holden starts to apologize, but Sally is upset and angry with him, and, finally, he leaves without her.

Holden sits in the lobby watching girls and waiting for Sally. She finally arrives ten minutes too late. They start a conversation about what had happened before they met each other. At the end of their talk, both decide to go ice-skating at Radio City. After a while Holden and Sally are fed up with ice-skating and they take a seat. Then Holden asks Sally if she wants to join him and leave this place and marry him perhaps someday. Sally said that this is ridiculous and tells him to leave her alone.

Michael Weber