

Holden's Thoughts of "Phoniness"

On earth, there are almost seven billion people, and they all have different opinions on everything. They stick to what they like, and they prevent themselves from what they do not like. Out of all those people, Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye* could explain what he did not like out of his negative views of the world. What is unique about it is that whenever he talked about what he did not like about certain people or things in his thoughts, he had described them as this unusual word: "phonies."

In the same way that Holden used "phony" to describe something or someone as dumb, he did give out examples of specific kinds of phonies he came across. It started in the very beginning of the novel when Holden was kicked out of his old school, Pencey Prep in Agerstown, Pennsylvania, for flunking four of his classes. While Holden was getting ready to leave, he pointed out the cons of his old school. According to him, the school had some of its ads showing a "hotshot guy on a horse jumping over a fence" (Salinger 2). The ads were on magazines, and Holden was sick and tired of seeing them out of the fact that he never saw a horse jumping over a fence anywhere in the campus. Thus, the reason Holden did not like his old school was because of its false advertising. Later, Holden felt sad and lonesome while being in one of the dorms of Pencey Prep, even when he was accompanied by Stradlater and Ackley, so he decided to run away to New York City, which was not far from where he lived. Holden met

lots of people there, while there were some that Holden saw as phonies, including some of the people staying in the Edmont Hotel. When Holden went to his room, he noticed something strange about some of the other guests when he looked out his window and saw a couple on the opposite side of the hotel. The couple was “squirting water out of their mouths at each other”. It started when the man drank from his highball, and then he spat it playfully at his girlfriend’s face and vice-versa, over and over again (Salinger 62). This annoyed Holden, and it made him think that he was different from the rest of the guests in the hotel whom he saw as perverts, including the couple; he considered himself the only “normal” guy in the building. Later, while Holden was still in New York, he went on a date with his friend, Sally, and also went to the movies by himself. At the theater, he watched *Oliver Twist* and had an enjoyable time. Yet, the only thing he did not find enjoyable was the mother sitting next to him who was as “kindhearted as a gosh darn wolf”, and kept crying over phony parts of the movie. Besides, she was too selfish about asking her son to sit still and behave himself when he wanted to go to the bathroom (Salinger 140). Holden thought this was all stupid when the mother bawled over dumb parts of a movie and acted like an idiot. As has been noted, Holden could quickly tell who was normal and who was a phony. People could pick up Holden from both his tone and his point of view about his opinion of others around him.

Although Holden thinks of certain people or things as phonies, readers notice that some of his actions in the novel would make him a phony as well. For example, when he was on the train heading from Agerstown to New York City, he met Mrs. Morrow, the mother of one of his classmates at Pencey Prep, Ernest. Although he liked her, he told her a fake identity and fake actions about himself because he “did not feel like giving her his whole life history”. Some of the false things he told her about himself were that his name was Rudolf Schmidt, he was bleeding

from being hit by an icy snowball, and that he liked and still attended Pencey Prep. While he had done that all on purpose, he was sorry for making up his identity, because he later admitted that he regretted making up his name to Mrs. Morrow (Salinger 54-55). Later, he would do the same thing to Sunny and some of the other people he met in New York City, even though it was mostly out of jealousy or anxiety. This was one of the actions Holden did in public, but whenever he was alone, the actions he did in that state made people learn more about the inner phoniness of Holden. Back when he was looking down at Pencey Prep from Thomsen Hill, Holden started running all the way towards Mr. Ackley's house through the winter-chilly, less-sunny afternoon. In the middle of his route, he stopped for a breath of air, but had trouble breathing. Holden, in his narration, commented that this was because he was "a heavy smoker, for one thing – that is, he used to be" (Salinger 5). The smoking he had done caused him to grow 6.5 inches and get T.B., although he was still healthy despite all the health issues he was suffering from in his opinion. However, despite quitting when other people asked him to quit, he still kept smoking a single carton of cigarettes throughout the story, especially in New York and in his apartment. Although Holden had been smoking just for fun, he became crazy over other things when he was in New York that he was also too young to do. Because he was kicked out of Pencey Prep, Holden knew that he could spend the rest of his college fund over something else while he was in New York, and the number one item he kept buying was alcoholic drinks. Moreover, whenever he met new people or reunited with some old friends, Holden almost always asked them out for a drink, as well as a few cab drivers and Faith Cavendish. Despite Holden enjoying to buy drinks and to ask people out for a drink, it was not until he was at the bar when his huge habit of drinking brought out its worst in Holden. After he finished his conversation with Luce, Holden bought a huge amount of drinks and made himself drunk and he

could “hardly see straight” (Salinger 150). Next, he was trying to make the people not notice he was wounded, because he eventually had a bullet in his stomach and he placed his hand and arms under his shirt to keep the blood there from dripping out. Since then, this somewhat made Holden learn his lesson. Though people do things that would make others see them as phonies, like Holden does, these other people would surprisingly do what others would also see as phony stuff. It would lead to them becoming phonies when they hate phonies, whether they know it or not.

While Holden was a good judge of who was a phony and who was not, there were some people in the world that he loved and cared for deeply. First off, Holden had a younger brother named Allie, whom he loved more than anybody else. He owned a baseball mitt which he uniquely wrote many of his poems on in green ink, and he did it whenever he was bored in baseball game practices. Whenever Holden thought about the past experiences he had with him, he was most guilty and regretful for the time he forgot to take Allie out for bike riding. Yet, he was not as regretful of Allie until the night Allie, at the age of eleven, died from leukemia. Holden was sleeping in the garage, and when he heard, he broke all the windows in the garage with his bare fists both “just for the heck of it” and out of his broken heart (Salinger 39). This led to his parents getting him psychoanalyzed, and prevented him from going to Allie’s funeral. Ever since the death of his little brother, Holden then saw Allie’s baseball mitt as the main reminder of him. While Holden still loved Allie after his death, he did not love him as much as he loved his little sister, Phoebe. Holden cherished her and loved her so much, he would describe her as both pretty and “smart even when she a very tiny little kid” (Salinger 68). Occasionally, he would also see her as too affectionate and too passionate sometimes, but he loved her nonetheless. He displayed his feelings towards her when he was in his second visit in New York City. Holden

started to feel like going west and living in a cabin for the rest of his life, and the first thing he would do is to say good-bye to Phoebe before he left. When he told her that she would not come with him, Phoebe started crying and even asked Holden to shut up, which even Holden saw as worse than swearing. When she ran away, Holden kept following her and kept asking her to go with him to the Central Park Zoo. When they did go to the zoo, Phoebe was still mad at him until they reached the carousel. Things worked out between the two, and Phoebe eventually gave her red hunting hat back to Holden. This nearly brought Holden to tears of joy, and he decided to stay sitting on the bench in the middle of the rain with a smile on his face while he watched Phoebe ride on one of the carousel horses. While Holden had loved his two siblings, Allie and Phoebe, more than anyone, there was another person that Holden loved. That person is named Jane Gallagher, and she was the previous – or possibly former - love interest of Holden. She and Holden used to do a lot of things together ever since they met from Jane's dog barking at the Caulfields. It included going to play tennis in the morning and golf in the afternoon, as well as Jane being the only person outside of Holden's family to be shown by Holden his brother's baseball mitt with the poems. One day, Holden and Jane were sitting on the porch of Jane's house on a rainy day, when a man suddenly walked into the house without responding. Jane was frightened and she cried from this, and Holden tried to make her feel better by kissing her all over her face, except her mouth. When they went out to the movies, Jane showed how much she cared for Holden by putting her hand on Holden's neck. Holden was surprised because this was a love gesture that mostly married couples or mothers and children would do to each other (Salinger 76-80). Then, while Holden was still at Pencey Prep with Ackley and Stradlater, he kept being reminded by Stradlater what good times he had with Jane, making Holden more and more nervous. The good times Stradlater had with Jane involved having sex with her, especially

in Ed Banky's car. Later, when Holden was in New York, he tried numerous times to give Jane a buzz and ask her how it was going. However, he knew that if he called her, Jane would start to change and not be so interested in Holden anymore. Therefore, he gave up calling her every time he was about to. While everyone has friends, if there was someone who was talented and had good friends that were cared for, Holden would be one of those people. Aside from pointing out who was a phony and who was not, Holden still knew that friendship and caring were some of the most important things in this world.

Everybody on earth has many different opinions about things and people, and if they have shown love or hatred to others, people would understand more. If someone could tell his or her own opinion of the world itself, Holden has a unique talent of love and judgment. He could tell what he did not like of some people that did dumb things by describing them as "phonies". When talking about who he likes, Holden can explain all the pros he knew about them, like he did with his brother and sister, Allie and Phoebe, and his girlfriend, Jane. Thus, Holden could be seen by many people as the perfect guy for superior judgment of others, whether these people were kind or, as Holden usually said, "phony".