

Student Name:

The Catcher in the Rye Study Guide

A bildungs- what???

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is a classic bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel. The main character, Holden Caulfield, feels great angst, struggling to connect with other people and find his place in the world. Unfortunately, Holden experiences many challenges ranging from the death of a family member to trouble in school. Through it all, Holden attempts to make sense of the world in which he lives, just as you do every day.

Be a Better Reader

As you work through the study guide for *The Catcher in the Rye*, you'll also practice these skills, which will help you when you read novels in the future, for school assignments or just for fun.

1. Describe the development of the main character.
2. Discuss how the plot develops throughout the novel.
3. Describe themes in the novel and trace their development throughout the text.
4. Cite textual evidence to support discussion of the novel.
5. Discuss how point of view affects the content of the novel.

Behind the Scenes

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of the most popular and most challenged books of the 20th century. Since being published in 1951, the novel has been translated into most languages and sold over 65 million copies. It has been named to *Time's* list of the 100 best English language novels written since 1923 and called one of the best English novels of the 20th century by Modern Library. While many teens identify with the novel, it consistently ranks in the Top Ten list of most challenged books for its vulgar language and depictions of sexuality, drinking, and smoking. Unfortunately, several disturbed individuals have identified so clearly with the protagonist, Holden Caulfield, they cited him when committing brutal crimes, including John Hinckley Jr.'s assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan and Mark David Chapman's shooting of Ex-Beatle John Lennon.

Get This!

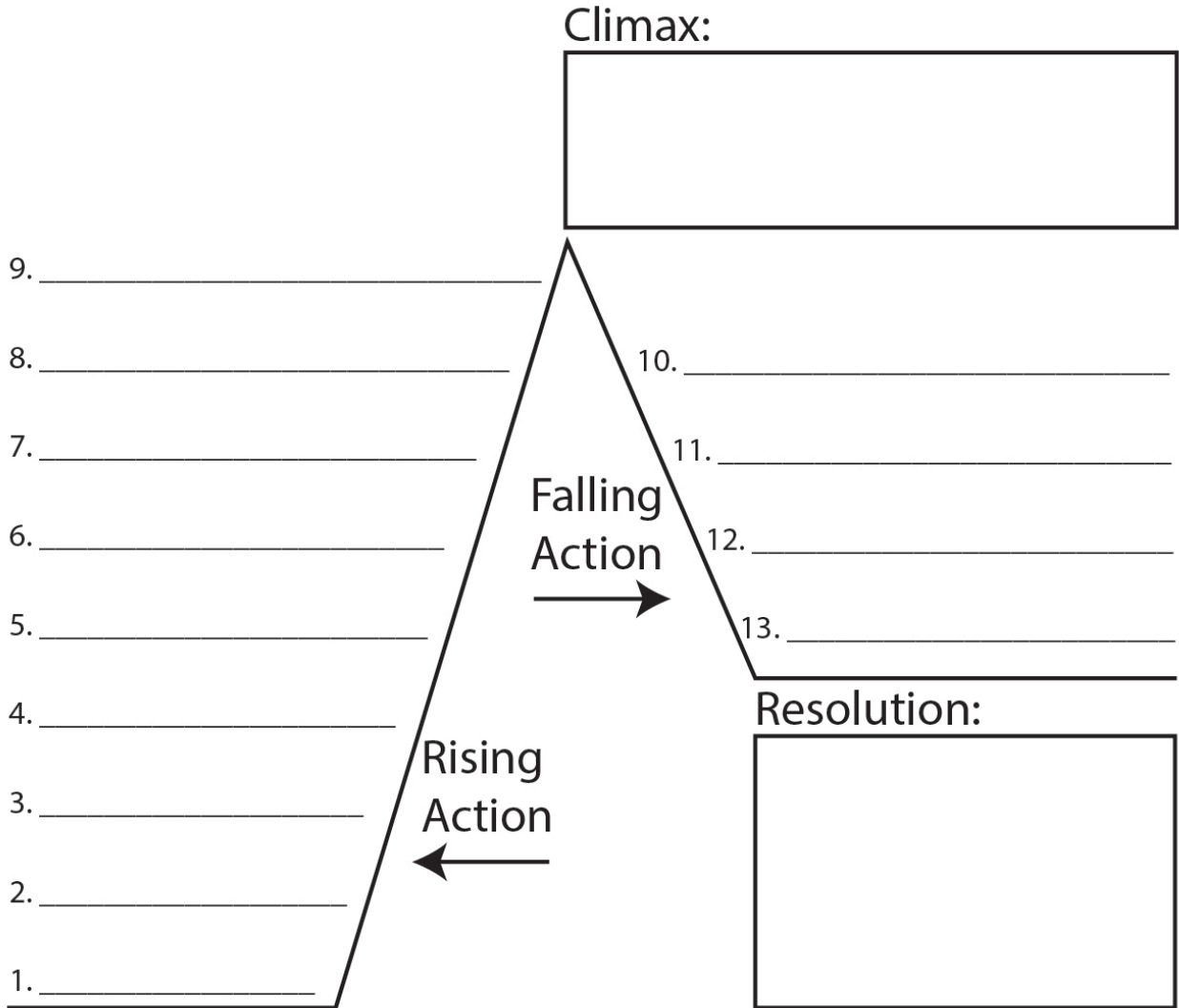
1. Notice how Holden's mental state fluctuates throughout the novel and assess his mental stability for yourself.
2. Look for patterns in the way Holden interacts with other people and decide if he seems more at ease with some people more than others.
3. Holden expresses numerous frustrations and irritations with society and his surroundings. Think about how much you agree or disagree with Holden's observations.

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The Plot

The Catcher in the Rye traces Holden Caulfield's chronicles attempts to connect with people at his school and from his past. As you read the novel, fill in the boxes for each element of the novel's plot.



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The Characters

All of *The Catcher in the Rye* focuses on the slow unraveling of Holden Caulfield's mental state. Even though Holden continues to try to connect with people on a deep, personal level, he feels continually rebuffed, even though his own actions are largely to blame for others' reactions to him.

Select five interactions that Holden has with people during the novel, describe how Holden acts, and the result of the interactions. Look for a pattern amongst the interactions and write a few sentences summarizing them.

<u>Person Holden Interacts With</u>	<u>How Holden Acts</u>	<u>Result of the Interaction</u>
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

Summarize Holden's Interactions with others:

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The Setting

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden is surrounded by wealthy students at a boarding school before he travels to New York City. Throughout the novel, Holden wages war against phonies and hypocrisy. Perhaps these locations contributed to Holden’s feelings of loneliness and disconnect.

Use the spaces below to describe the settings in the novel. In the first column, type or write direct quotes from the novel—phrases and sentences that are used to show what it’s like throughout the story. In the second column, explain in your own words how these locations may have contributed to Holden’s feelings of disconnect and irritations with phoniness. An example has been completed for you.

Direct Quote Related to Setting	Your Explanation
“Pencey Prep is this school . . . the probably came to Pencey that way.” (p. 2)	Pencey Prep’s literature paints a false sense of the activities at the school, as well as the quality of students there.

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Tracking Themes

What message is J.D. Salinger trying to communicate in *The Catcher in the Rye*? The main themes in *The Catcher in the Rye* involve the challenges of growing up and the hypocrisy of the adult world. See if you can identify and analyze those themes.

Step 1: What parts of the plot seem related to a possible theme in the novel? (Think about the main conflict and how it got resolved or worked out.)

Step 2: Which characters and events seem related to a possible theme? Which characters change, and what do those changes suggest about the challenges of growing up and the hypocrisy of the adult world?

Step 3: How does J.D. Salinger use symbols to hint at the novel's themes? What objects, people, or places stand for something "bigger" in the story?

Step 4: What does the novel's title suggest about the novel's theme? Why do you think Salinger named his novel *The Catcher in the Rye*?

Step 5: Write one or two of the novel's main themes in your own words.

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Talk About It

What do you think about *The Catcher in the Rye*? Could you identify with Holden or did you find him boorish and whiny? In the space below each question, write an answer based on your own experiences and your own understanding of the novel. Include some textual evidence or examples that helped you arrive at your answer.

1. How much did you identify with and/or empathize with Holden? Could you see some of yourself in him, or did you find him to be spoiled and whiny?

Textual Evidence:

2. Evaluate Holden's interactions with other people. Did you see a pattern emerging as the book progressed? Do you agree with Holden's assessment of the situations, or do you think he is partly at blame for some of the situations he found himself in with others?

Textual Evidence:

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Represent!

Show what you know about *The Catcher in the Rye* and its relevance to your life. Choose one of these projects to complete and share with your teacher, classmates, and others.

Choice 1: What Happens Next?

The novel concludes with Holden in a mental hospital after suffering some type of breakdown. While Holden seems hopeful of recovery, he gives no evidence to support that he or his outlook has changed in any way.

Write a sequel to *The Catcher in the Rye*. Include what you believe happens to Holden after he leaves the hospital. By the way, numerous people asked J.D. Salinger to write a sequel to *The Catcher in the Rye*, but he refused to do so.

Choice 2: Holden Himself

The novel centers on Holden Caulfield's personal struggles. While Holden shares a lot with the reader, perhaps he does not tell the reader everything he is thinking.

Create and perform a monologue as Holden Caulfield (without the inappropriate language) to try to gain more insight into Holden as a character. By the way, J.D. Salinger refused to sell the rights to allow *The Catcher in the Rye* to be made into a movie or a play.