

Name

Course Number

Instructor

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Innocence in 'The Catcher in the Rye' by J.D. Salinger

Introduction

"Certain things should stay the way they are. You ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and leave them alone. I know that's impossible, but it's too bad anyway."

(16) The quote reflects on the changes one experiences in life that seem to lead to the worst yet are inevitable. The Catcher in the Rye's central theme is that of innocence and its protection, as manifested in words said by the main protagonist, Holden, and other characters in the novel.

Holden, experiencing a personal struggle with growing up, feels that he has to protect the innocence of other characters such as his ten years old sister Phoebe and a former close friend Jane Gallagher. Salinger depicts the struggle of growing up and understanding the adult world, a struggle experienced by most teenagers. Readers explore the struggles of a teenager growing up in a world he perceives to be too dangerous and artificial. The novel explores the theme of protection of the innocence through the perspectives and thoughts of the main protagonist Holden about his younger sister Phoebe, Jane Gallagher, as well as those of his favorite teacher Mr. Antolini.

Holden, the narrator, faces a personal struggle with protecting his innocence as he grows up. Although Holden is worried about the innocence of other characters such as his ten-year-old sister and former close friend Jane Gallagher, his struggle is in protecting his innocence and loss of it. The author details how Holden views the world differently when he refers to his peers, such as Stradlater and adults, as 'phonies.' In his reflections, he argues that the adult world is cruel and

filled with artificiality. He mainly picks on his school's motto "Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men," which he believes is lies as the conditions led one of the students to commit suicide. Holden struggles to adapt to this 'phony' environment that lacks authenticity, integrity, and promotes the loss of innocence. The struggle pushes him to isolation and expulsion from school. Bloom argues that the escape represents Holden's attempt to protect and exclude himself from what he believes to be the corruption of the adult world (32). However, he ends up in the streets of New York and has firsthand experience of the extremes of the adult world, such as drugs, prostitution, and sex.

The belief that innocence should be protected is based on the genuine interactions Holden has had with his younger sister Phoebe. Phoebe is Holden's most trusted ally in the family. Through Holden's interaction with Phoebe, Salinger shows how she learns of the things she chooses to emphasize on and how she sees through her brother and his struggle. It is through these interactions that Holden shares his intention of being the 'Catcher of the rye' to her. In this, he wishes to protect Phoebe and other children from the dangers of the adult world. Holden's reflection of an observation he made of a child protected by his parents inspires him to wish for the safety of Phoebe and others such as Jane, whom he perceives as innocent. Privitera argues that Salinger utilizes these interactions to allow a better comprehension of the intentions of Holden and how it affects his interactions with other characters (203). For instance, when Holden observes the profanities written on the walls frequently used by his younger sister, he is angered and distressed as he interprets this as the spillover effects of an adult world reaching young children. Holden's bad experience with the adult world puts him in the desire to protect the innocence of childhood from those close to him.

The adult world is a dangerous place for the innocent. Jane shares a close relationship with Holden, who feels responsible for protecting the innocence, Jane. Holden, the narrator, captures the reader when he narrates his relationship with Jane. He also shows his concerns that her stepfather could be abusing Jane gauging from her behavior when he was around. Pinsker argues that author uses the interaction to show how a complicated background could affect the interactions of an innocent woman (14). Holden's fight with Stradlater just before leaving school after Stradlater date with Jane and subsequent praise of Jane's character is a clear depiction that the author believes in protecting innocence. As a result, the author encodes innocence into Jane's personality and shows how different characters, such as the weird stepfather and the athletic Stradlater, attempt to take advantage of her innocence. Privitera also equips that the author also uses the character of Jane to show Holden's commitment to innocence in the particular way he respects and speaks highly of Jane Gallagher (204). Innocence, the author shows, accompanies a depth of character. It., however, is attractive to 'phony' characters that attempt to exploit it.

The willingness to learn and engage education in cultivating native abilities could also help in the navigation into the adult world in a means that safeguards innocence. Mr. Antolini, Holden's former English teacher, argues that Holden's negative attitude towards adult life would make him have a terrible life for a cause he believes to be less worthy. Takeuchi argues that Salinger uses the character of Mr. Antolini to communicate with Holden about his choices and perspectives on life. Holden sees Mr. Antolini as a mentor, and a figure like his older brother D.B., but with more courage and heart. Privitera upholds that these are people Holden tends to look up to as those that could protect his innocence (205). This gives Mr. Antolini the credibility to criticize Holden's actions. In doing this, Salinger uses Mr. Antolini makes a case for education to Holden, he argues that Holden might end up thirty years and hating everyone because he

chooses to protect innocence in a manner that disintegrates him from the adult society. Mr. Antolini is quoted noting that "The mark of an immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of a mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one." In the subtle critique, Mr. Antolini urges Holden to overlook the challenges he faces with integrating into adult life and instead embrace it in a symbiotic relationship in which he teaches and learns from others. The author uses Mr. Antolini to showcase a different approach to the protection of innocence that Holden could use to navigate his life and cause (Takeuchi 164). The author proposes that education is a pathway to cultivate native abilities that Holden could use to navigate the adult world while also pursuing his life's purpose.

Conclusion

Through the thoughts, perspectives, and personalities of significant characters Holden, Phoebe, Jane Gallagher, and Mr. Antolini, the author explores the concept of innocence and its protection in the adult world. Holden's struggle with growing up helps readers understand how he relates to his innocence and wishes to retain aspects of his childhood experiences. The main protagonist is presented as an individual attempting to exclude himself from an adult world he terms as phony and artificial and his commitment to protecting those he cares about from the dangers of the world. Phoebe, the protagonist's ten-year-old sister, is presented as the epitome of innocence. In her genuineness, she makes Holden stay and feel responsible for protecting her innocence. The author also uses the character of Jane Gallagher to show how the innocent and genuine often attract phonies who attempt to take advantage of them. In a guiding light, the author offers a credible path for sustaining the path of protecting innocence while also engaging with the world and its phonies. In the form of Mr. Antolini's thoughts, he argues that education

enables native capabilities that make it easier to explore the world positively and live for a cause.

In this case, it's protecting innocence.

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Works Cited

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