

Catcher in the Rye
Discussion Questions

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1	A. What information does Holden give about himself in the very opening of the novel? What relationships are set up early? B. What is Holden's relationship like with Pencey Prep? C. What does Holden like about Selma Thurmer and why? D. What is Holden looking for (really) when he says he was "trying to feel some kind of a good-by" (4)? E. What do you make of this line: "After I got across the road, I felt like I was sort of disappearing" (5)?
2	A. Consider the aesthetics of the novel so far. What makes this book feel realistic, rather than dramatic or romanticized? B. Describe Mr. Spencer. Explore his relationship with Holden and how he treats him. C. What is Holden's real reaction to the following quote: "Life <i>is</i> a game, boy. Life <i>is</i> a game that one plays according to the rules." D. What is the relationship between Holden's dialogue and his internal thoughts? E. Consider this line in relationship to the reader: "People never notice anything" (9). How might an unobservant reader miss certain details about Holden? What details would they miss? F. How are teachers depicted in the opening of the novel? (Mr. Spencer as a representative) G. What does Holden's note at the end of the exam (12) suggest about his emotional or mental state? Consider what he really wants, versus what he says he wants. H. Holden has his first mention of the lake in this chapter. Come back to this after you read the book more. Consider his attachment to this image and his larger fears about his life.
3	A. Holden says that he is "the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life" (16). However, why did he lie to Mr. Spencer? Why does he feel like he has to constantly lie? B. Why does Holden call himself "illiterate" (18) when he seems to read regularly and seems to enjoy it as an escape? C. Describe Ackley. Explore his relationship between Ackley and Holden. D. What do you make of the line: "This is a people shooting hat... I shoot people in this hat" (22)? E. Why does Holden "horse around" and begin doing his old, blind man routine with Ackley? How might this be Holden's attempt to fight back? Explore. F. Explore Holden's relationship with his own age. Is he insecure? Why? Explore.
4	A. How does Holden characterize Stradlater? B. Why does Holden begin awkwardly acting like the "Governor's son" (29)? What is he trying to avoid or how is he trying to get power or attention? C. How does Holden attempt to express his masculinity in this chapter? How does Holden view his own masculinity in comparison to Stradlater? D. How does Stradlater react to Holden's stories about Jane Gallagher? What does this reveal about his character? E. What does Holden think of Jane Gallagher? How can you tell? F. How does Holden view himself? Is he confident? Explain. G. Why does Holden get nervous toward the end of the chapter? H. How is Stradlater similar to Ackley?
5	A. Holden invites Ackley to go out with him and his other friends. What does this reveal about his relationship with Ackley? B. Why doesn't Holden throw the snowball? What does this reveal about Holden's relationship with aesthetics and perfection (appearance)? C. Explore the invasiveness of Ackley in this chapter. D. Explore the imagery of Allie's glove and his character as Holden describes it. E. How did Holden react to Allie's death? What information does he provide? Leave out? F. Holden was 13 when Allie died (11 years old). Holden is 16 in the story (17 as the narrator). How does this explain some of his behaviors or actions or attachments in chapters 1-4? Revisit a few instances in those chapters.
6	A. How does Holden react to Stradlater's dismissal of his composition? Why does he react this way? B. How does Holden feel about Stradlater's date with Jane? Why? What information does Stradlater give him? C. Explore the confrontation between Holden and Stradlater. What happened and why? How should we, as readers, judge Stradlater and Holden in this instance? D. What is Stradlater insecure about? Explain. E. Consider the moment where Holden looks at himself in the mirror. Explore his emotions at this moment.

7	A. Why doesn't Holden open up to Ackley? Suppose that he did. What might Ackley say? B. How does Holden mirror and counter Ackley's aggression in this chapter? C. Holden says that he "felt like jumping out the window" (48) each time he thought about Stradlater sleeping with Jane Gallagher. How should we, as readers, interpret this line? D. Explore the description of Stradlater's technique. What seems off about this description. E. Why does Holden feel so "sad and lonesome" (51) at the end of this chapter? Explore that emotion. F. What feelings does Holden have toward his mother at the moment? What are his fears and worries with special consideration to his mother?
8	A. Why does Holden mention the appearance of Mrs. Morrow? What does this reveal about his priorities and his character? B. Consider what Holden thinks of Mrs. Morrow as a mother. What does his thoughts about her capacity as a mother reveal about his own relationship with his mother? C. Consider the disconnect between Holden's dialogue and his thoughts. What does this reveal about his character? Why is his dialogue so different from his thoughts? D. Why does Holden lie about Earnest Morrow's character to his mother? What is motivating him to act this way? E. Why does Holden begin to smoke? What is he attempting to imitate?
9	A. What emotions is Holden feeling when he cycles through the people he could call? Why does he ultimately decide on not calling anyone? B. Why does Holden ask about the ducks in the lake? What might the ducks and the lake symbolize? This is the second mention of the ducks and the lake. C. What is Holden's reaction to the cross dresser? The 2 people "squirting water out of their mouths at each other" (62)? What themes are connected to this short incident? D. Who is Faith Cavendish and why does Holden call her? What is his attraction to her and is this genuine? Explore. E. Explore Holden's conversation with Faith Cavendish. What lines stand out?
10	A. Explore the characterization and descriptions of Allie. How might Holden's descriptions be biased? Is there anything that he might leave out and why would he leave it out? B. Explore the quick interaction between Holden and the Bartender. Who is Holden trying to be? C. How does Holden describe the "three witches" he sees in the Lavender room? D. Explore the interaction between Holden and the "three witches" in the Lavender room. Specifically, how is the reality of this interaction different from the way that Holden describes it? E. How is Holden insecure about his age in this chapter? Explore a few instances. F. What is ironic about Holden calling the girls "ignorant" in this chapter? G. Why is the night club a bad place to help Holden cope with his current psychological turmoil?
11	A. What was the relationship between Holden and Jane like? B. What attracts Holden to Jane? C. Explore the discrepancy between the way Holden talks and thinks about Jane and how Holden has treated women up to this point in the novel. D. Explore the brief interaction between Jane and her step father (where he asked about cigarettes), Mr. Cudahy. Why did she begin to cry? E. As a reader, what is frustrating about Holden's narration? What details does he leave out and how does this mold the reading experience? F. Why is Holden uncomfortable about Jane being associated with Stradlater and Ed Banky's car?
12	A. Holden brings up the ducks with Horwitz, the cab driver. How might Horwitz actually give Holden some good advice? What does his advice mean, figuratively? B. If Holden is a 'duck,' who are the 'fish'? C. What are Holden's negative criticisms against Ernie? Are they justified? Are there any positive comments about him? D. What is "phony" to Holden in this chapter? E. Holden says that "Real ugly girls have it tough." What does this reveal about the way he views relationships, sexuality, and the world? Is this a mature or childish view? F. What is Holden trying to do in the club, anyway? What is his goal? G. Who is Lillian Simmons? Explore the interaction she has with Holden. Why does he lie to her and leave?
13	A. Why does Holden avoid taxis in this chapter? What is he not saying? B. Explore Holden's day-dreaming about his gloves getting stolen. What does this incident reveal about his courage, his relationship with violence, or his perception of himself? C. What does "yellow" mean to Holden? Why does he view himself this way and what does this reveal about his self-perception?

	D. Explore the brief reference to Raymond Goldfarb. What is Holden’s relationship like with alcohol? What does he believe it will solve? What does he expect from alcohol? E. Explore the interaction between Holden and the elevator pimp, Maurice. How does Holden seem to treat some women and how does treat others (e.g. Jane Gallagher)? Why? F. What is Holden’s expectation of sex? Marriage? How does he prepare for the prostitute and what does this reveal about his character? G. Explore the interaction between “Jim Steele” (Holden) and the prostitute, Sunny. What stands out as awkward? Disgusting? Annoying? Sad? Ironic? H. Explore the character of Sunny, the prostitute. What is she like? Compared to Holden, is she more or less corrupt? More or less moral? Why? I. Why didn’t Holden sleep with the prostitute? What is he really looking for? What does he say he is looking for?
14	A. Why does Holden talk to his brother Allie at the beginning of this chapter? What are the benefits and the downsides of him doing this? B. Explore the brief incident with Bobby Fallon, Allie, and Holden. What feelings does this incident bring up? Why? C. Explore Holden’s rant about religion, Jesus, and the Disciples. D. Explore the incident with Maurice and Holden. How does Holden act? How do you feel, as a reader, about this incident? Do you feel sorry for Holden, frustrated, angry, etc.? Why? E. Why does Holden recede into roleplay and daydreaming again at the end of this chapter? How does this help him cope with the incident? F. How have movies influenced the way Holden thinks and feels? Is this something he is aware of? Can you make a personal connection here?
15	A. What does Holden think of Sally Hayes and why does he call her? B. What does Holden reveal about his parents in this chapter? How does that change the reader’s perception of him or his behavior? C. What does Holden’s anecdote about Dick Slagle reveal about Holden’s awareness? What is he aware of and what is he not aware of? D. Explore the interaction between Holden and the nuns. What do the nuns represent and how do they challenge Holden’s expectations or preconceived notions? E. What is Holden’s relationship like with religion?
16	A. What criticisms does Holden have against Sally Hayes’s mother? How does this connect to authenticity (“phonies”)? B. Why does the family with the little kid “about six years old” make Holden feel “not so depressed any more”? C. What does Holden buy for Phoebe? What does his excitement about this gift reveal about his character? Priorities? D. What are Holden’s criticisms of <i>Hamlet</i> and Hamlet (the character)? E. What do you, as a reader, make of the interaction between Holden and the little kids in this chapter? What does Holden want to relive or do? F. Explore the anecdote about Holden’s childhood and his visit to the museum. What does this reveal about what Holden wants and his desires? Why is he fixated on the frozen figures of the museum? G. The last page of this chapter shifts back to Phoebe. Consider everything that has happened (see question F) in this chapter. What does this chapter reveal about Holden’s worries with Phoebe? Allie?
17	A. How does Holden view masculinity? B. How does Holden behave with Sally Hayes in the cab? Why does he behave this way? Do you condemn him for his actions here? C. What are Holden’s issues with movies and the Lunts and Ernie? How is the book a representation of Holden’s beliefs on art? D. How does Holden feel about Sally after her interaction with the “Andover bastard”? Why does he feel this way? E. Explore Holden’s rants to Sally Hayes at the skating rink bar. How does Holden act? How was he acting before his filter dropped? F. Why does Holden want to run away? What do you, as a reader, think of his plan? G. What does Sally Hayes remind Holden of? Do her words to Holden toward the end of the chapter carry any hint of truth to them? How does Holden react to those words?
18	A. How does Holden feel about Jane dating Al Pike? What does this reveal about what Holden believes about relationships and his expectations for his partner? B. Projecting (in psychology) is when a person takes the negative qualities they are ashamed of and pushes them on to other people (like a cheater accusing another of cheating); they believe other people are just like them and ignore their own faults. How and why does Holden project in this chapter? C. Why does Holden criticize the Christmas parade?

	D. Explore Holden's comments about D.B.'s military service. Is his commentary negative or positive? Why?
19	A. How does Holden characterize Old Luce? B. Explore the conversation between Old Luce and Holden. What does Luce think of Holden? What does Holden think of Luce? C. What does the following line reveal about Holden: "Maybe I'll go to China. My sex life is lousy" (147). D. According to Luce, what is the purpose of psychoanalysis? Do you, as a reader, feel that Holden needs this? Why?
20	A. How does Holden act now that he is really drunk? How, if at all, has this changed his problems or how he deals with his problems? B. Why does Holden call Sally at this moment, even after everything that happened in chapter 17? What might Sally think of Holden at this moment? C. Why does Holden go to the lake in the park? When he gets there, what does he notice or see? D. How does Holden react when he breaks the record he bought for Phoebe? How is this connected to the way he perceives himself? E. Why does Holden start picturing his own funeral? What details stand out to you, as a reader? F. Why does Holden start thinking of Allie's funeral at this moment? What elements does he remember? And significant elements left out? G. Why does Holden ultimately decide against his own death or potential suicide? Why does he ultimately leave that park bench and head home?
21	A. How does Holden describe his mother? What does this reveal about the family structure? (Brief mention on the bottom of page 158) B. What does Holden notice walking around the room? What stands out as significant? C. Explore the conversation between Holden and Phoebe. How do they talk to each other? Is Holden getting the psychological support he needs talking with Phoebe? Why? D. How does Phoebe react to the broken record? What does this reveal about their relationship? How does Holden react to her reaction? (Hint: he doesn't mention this past part explicitly) E. How does Phoebe 'check' or challenge Holden, especially when he mentions that he was kicked out?
22	A. How does Phoebe react to Holden's idea about running away to a ranch? Is this a good or a bad thing? Explain. B. How does Holden's demeanor about his failures change when talking with Phoebe? C. Explore the story about James Castle. Consider that this is the first time that Holden has mentioned anything about him. Consider that he doesn't even mention this is Allie, even though it's on his mind when he's talking with her. How might have Holden felt when he saw James Castle's body? D. How is Phoebe dealing with the death of her older brother, Allie? E. Why does Holden want to be a catcher in the rye? Why is this ironic? How is Phoebe fulfilling this role, instead?
23	A. Explore the brief dancing with Phoebe. What emotions is Holden feeling at this moment? Why is he feeling that way? B. Why does Phoebe take the blame for the cigarette? How does this incident make Holden feel? How does this connect to his self-perception? C. What is significant about Phoebe giving Holden her Christmas money? D. Why does Holden begin to cry when he leaves? How does he react to or repress these emotions?
24	A. What is Mr. Antolini like? How does he fit or contrast Holden's expectations of masculinity? Men in film? His own goals for his own masculinity? B. What do you make of Mr. Antolini's talk about Holden's "terrible, terrible fall" (186-7)? C. What is the mark of a mature man (188)? What does this quote from Wilhelm Stekel mean? How might Holden benefit from it? D. What is the purpose of history, poetry, etc. according to Mr. Antolini? E. What happens at the end of this chapter with Mr. Antolini and Holden? Is there anything sinister, evil, or disgusting in the way Mr. Antolini was petting Holden?
25	A. What do you make of Holden's desperate cries to Allie (198)? What does this reveal about his deep-rooted fears and anxieties? B. Why does Holden get upset about the graffiti (201-2)? C. Explore the brief interaction between Holden and the 2 kids at the museum (about the mummies). What is significant about this interaction? D. Explore the interaction between Holden and Phoebe in this chapter. What lines of dialogue stand out? What are Holden's fears at this moment? What conflicts are occurring? E. What does Holden realize when he is talking with Phoebe in this chapter?

	F. Why does Holden ultimately change his mind and decide to stay? G. Why did Holden start crying at the end of this chapter? What is so significant about Phoebe's carousel ride?
26	A. What are Holden's feelings at the closing of his novel? B. Why does Holden leave any additional information out? C. Why might have J. D. Salinger (author) leave out any additional information about Holden at the closing of this novel? (such as what happens to him, if he ends up OK, etc.) D. How has Holden changed throughout the course of the novel? What has not changed?