

Alone Together:
J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

By Christopher Hermosilla

Section III:

Unit Materials and Handouts

Day 1: Anticipation Guide

Read the following statements. In the spaces provided, respond with your opinion of whether you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with the statement.

_____ 1. People should always be themselves, no matter where they are or what they do.

_____ 2. It's easy to tell when someone is being real to me and when someone is being fake.

_____ 3. Sometimes the world we live in makes kids "grow up" too fast.

_____ 4. I act and speak differently at times, depending on who I'm with and where I am, but I still always feel like myself.

_____ 5. I think a lot of adults don't have a clue what kinds of pressure teenagers are facing today.

_____ 6. I have a pretty good idea about what I want to do with my life after I finish high school.

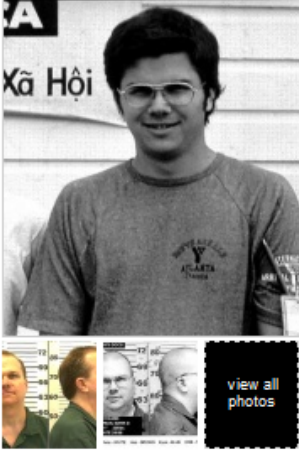
_____ 7. It's always better to have someone tell you what they really think and feel, even if it's painful—no matter what.

_____ 8. I'll definitely know when I'm "grown up."

_____ 9. My friends know everything about me.

_____ 10. My friends only know the things about me that I want them to know about.

Day 2: Bio of Mark David Chapman



Mark David Chapman Biography

Assassin / Convict

Mark David Chapman shot and killed musician [John Lennon](#) December 8, 1980, outside the Dakota Apartments in New York City. Mark David Chapman was a former security guard from Hawaii who came to New York specifically to attack the famous ex-Beatle. He waited outside the Dakota, then shot Lennon as he was returning with his wife, [Yoko Ono](#), from a late-night recording session. Though Chapman's lawyer initially entered a plea of insanity, Chapman later changed the plea to guilty. He was sentenced to 20 years to life in prison, a sentence which he is serving in New York's Attica prison. Mark David Chapman became eligible for parole in 2000, but has been denied parole in hearings every two years since then, most recently in August of 2010.

Extra credit: Mark David Chapman was carrying a copy of the [J.D. Salinger](#) book *The Catcher In the Rye* when he killed Lennon... Chapman married the former Gloria Hiroko in 1979 in Hawaii. They remain married, and Gloria Chapman lives in Hawaii.

The Spot Where John Lennon Died Is Now the Shampoo Aisle

Mark David Chapman Denied Parole Again

Mark David Chapman is 56 years old

Born: 10 May 1955

Birthplace: Fort Worth, Texas

Best known as:
The man who killed John Lennon

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—taken from <http://www.who2.com/bio/mark-david-chapman>

Day 2: Key reading points and general discussion questions:

Ch. 1:

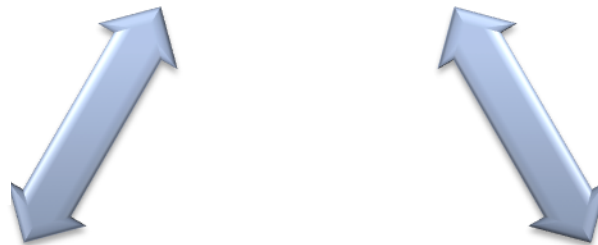
- The entire first paragraph: characterization through tone, writing style, and sentence structure. Ask students: Who is Holden? Begin developing who he is, his personality, his likes and dislikes.
- “Pencey Prep”: preparatory schools, do the students know about preppies and prep school imagery?
- “scrawny and faggy,” “you can see a few girls once in a while”—how much of his personality is sexist, and how much is based on the fact this was written in 1951? Open dialogue about the novel’s controversial elements.
- Mr. Thurman “a phony slob”—point out “phony,” a recurring trend that Holden will obsess over during the novel, and a reference to some of the questions in the anticipation guide that refers to people being “real” and being “fake.”
- “That’s how I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these goddamn checkups and stuff.” Reference back to page 1, “this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy.” What is “this crumby place”? A mental hospital—did Holden have a breakdown? How might this affect how you read this novel?
- “They didn’t have a maid or anything, and they always opened the door themselves. They didn’t have too much dough.” Going back to prep schools, Holden seems to come from a lot of money—does that affect his personality, or your opinion of him?

Day 3: *Catcher* Theme Poster (on large posterboard to hang in room)

The Catcher in the Rye: Themes & Essential Questions

- What does it mean to be real, and what does it mean to be “phony”?
- How do we know what is genuine and what isn’t?
- If a part of something or someone is phony, does that make everything about it phony?

Questioning
Authenticity



Growing Up/
Coming-of-Age



Belonging
& Isolation

- What’s the difference between being a child and being an adult?
- What kinds of experiences lead a person to grow up?
- Is growing up more physical, mental, or emotional?
- What does it mean to be “mature”?

- What does it mean to “belong” or “fit in” with a group?
- Do you define who you are because you belong to a group, or do you belong to a group because of who you are?
- What happens to you when you change groups or become removed from a group?

Day 4: “Woman & Hats” picture



One woman, nine hats: How is each hat a symbol of her identity?

Day 5: Key reading points and general discussion questions:

Review elements of Chapter 6:

- Talk about sections where Holden mentions his memories, and ask students whether they think it's actually due to a bad memory or not:
 - “Some things are hard to remember. I’m thinking now of when Stradlater got back from his date with Jane. I mean I can’t remember exactly what I was doing when I heard his goddamn stupid footsteps coming down the corridor. I probably was still looking out the window, but I swear I can’t remember. I was so damn worried, that’s why.”
 - “I don’t even remember where I was sitting when he came in—at the window, or in my chair or his. I swear I can’t remember.”
 - “This next part I don’t remember so hot. ... I got up from the bed and tried to sock him. The next thing I knew, I was on the goddam floor.”
- Recall back to Chapter 1—Holden’s in some kind of mental hospital, and this clearly compromises what we read. But on the other hand, our exercise with recalling hats shows that sometimes our memories can’t be trusted. Does that mean you’re all crazy, too? Or just teenagers with a lot on their minds?
- How does this tie into our first major theme: Questioning authenticity? How do we know what’s real and what’s fake? Is being “phony” purpose different from being “phony” by accident?

Day 6: *Rebel Without a Cause* background info

(taken and adapted from http://www.wadsworth.com/history_d/special_features/at_the_movies/Rebel/background.html)

Although the postwar baby boom generation had not yet reached its teenage years by the mid-1950s, middle-class adults had become fixated on maladjusted adolescents. (Two contemporary films—*The Wild One* [1953] and *Blackboard Jungle* [1955]—also attracted wide attention.) As the media spotlighted juvenile delinquency, director Nicholas Ray unveiled *Rebel Without a Cause* to explain what was troubling well-to-do youth in this decade of prosperity. His answers revealed the era's propensity to see social problems as "psychological"—part of the so-called "age of anxiety." Instead of demanding social change, individuals needed to adjust to "reality."

Underlying these concerns was the realization that the middle-class family was experiencing fundamental changes. During World War II, the nation's marriage and birth rates began to climb. Nine months after the war ended, an unprecedented baby boom started, lasting until about 1957. Popular advice and media messages encouraged women to become wives, mothers, and homemakers, leaving men to be the family breadwinners.

By 1950, however, women were returning to the work force in rising numbers. ... Middle-class women who remained homemakers in the 1950s often expressed unhappiness at the insignificance of their lives. Some returned to school. Others turned to alcohol or newly available tranquilizing pills. Still others visited mental health professionals. Widespread dissatisfaction among middle-class homemakers eventually provided the data for Betty Friedan's best selling book of 1963, *The Feminine Mystique*, which critiqued the myth of "the happy housewife."

While more middle-class women were experiencing new social roles, changes in the economy were altering the nature of men's work. As technology increased the productivity of the manufacturing sector, more jobs opened in the service or management parts of the economy. Instead of working with their hands, more men were working with their brains. According to the U.S. Census, 1955 was the first year in which there were more jobs in the service sector than in manufacturing.

Numerous popular books (David Reisman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950); William Whyte's *The Organization Man* (1957) and movies like *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956) lamented the loss of male independence in the corporate world and the rise of social conformity. Advertisers responded to these concerns by introducing successful icons of old-fashioned male virility, such as the "Marlboro Man." These questions of male identity are central to the family crisis in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

During the 1950s, changes in the family also shifted their locale from cities to suburbs. In traditional Hollywood movies (e.g., *Knock on Any Door* [1949]), juvenile delinquents were urban creatures, the result of impoverished living conditions. “We will find them,” remarked Senator Estes Kefauver, who headed a subcommittee on juvenile delinquency, in 1953, “in the slums, where the kids don’t have a place to play.”

Rebel Without a Cause suggests that troubled adolescents exist in affluent families as well. As postwar policies promoted residential development of the suburbs, critics complained about the homogenization of dwellings and the middle-class people who inhabited them. Instead of encouraging personal independence, affluent lifestyles seemed to demand conformity.

Day 7: Streaming video links of New York in the 1950s

- **Footage of NYC:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MSp8kfuuFo>
- **New York, 1950s:** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKjugTl9tks&feature=related>
- **Broadway 1950s NYC at night:**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWrDiw5KXmk&feature=related>
- **Spectacular New York, 1956** (a guided video tour of NYC):
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa7WpL9d_B4&feature=related
- **This is New York, 1950:**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQJQRGAo3KY&feature=relmfu>

Day 7: Key reading points and general discussion questions:

Ch. 11

- “that afternoon Jane and I got close to necking”—talk about the distinction between what Holden sees and what the reader can infer happened here between Jane and her mother’s boyfriend. Holden can’t seem to admit there’s any wrongdoing here—why? Why does he seem attracted to Jane?
- If Holden likes Jane so much, why does he keep thinking about calling her, but never actually calls? (Hinting at not wanting to reach back into the past to change anything.)
- What else does Holden seem to want to protect?
- How does Holden’s memories of Jane compare to how he treated the 3 girls in the club from Chapter 10?
- “I don’t even like to talk about it, if you want to know the truth.” Why can’t Holden shut up, then? The irony of him not seeing his own faults. What other faults does he have that he can’t see? Is he a hypocrite, or just misguided?

Day 8: Do-now freewrite prompt

2011:

“These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time. ... Digital connections ... may offer the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other.”

—Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (pp. xii, 1)

1951:

“I’m always saying ‘Glad to’ve met you’ to somebody I’m not at *all* glad I met. If you want to stay alive, you have to say that stuff, though.” —Holden, Chapter 12 (p. 87)

Compare the above quotes, separated by 60 years. Do you agree or disagree with them? How are they related? Have you ever friended someone on Facebook who’s not *really* your friend? What does being a “friend” really mean today, in an age where everyone is online and connected?

Day 8: Key reading points and general discussion questions:

Ch. 14:

- From the do-now, lead discussion of relationships and isolation into what happened between Holden and Sunny in Chapter 13. Why did he get “depressed” when she took her dress off? Why did he call her in the first place? Why does Holden talk so much about sex in his mind, but seems to change when it comes time to actually do it?
- How does Sunny’s age, mannerisms, and appearance affect Holden? Does Holden see her as an adult, or as a child?
- Begin reading Ch. 14: “talking out loud to Allie, when I get depressed.” Holden retreating into childhood memories when faced with a sexual encounter.
- The shakedown with Sunny and Maurice the pimp. Holden is terrified, begins crying, but still manages to speak up for himself—gets punched. Then he begins pretending he’s in the movies—“The goddamn movies. They can ruin you. I’m not kidding.” If Holden hates the movies so much, why did he just pretend he was shot in the stomach? More avoidance into escapism?

Day 12: Key reading points and general discussion questions:

Ch. 22:

- Begin by asking students to describe Holden's relationship with Phoebe from Ch. 21. Why is he so comfortable around her?
- Draw students' attention to the third theme of our unit: Growing up/coming-of-age. How many times has Holden been told to "grow up" by other people? Is he an adult, or a child? With Holden and Phoebe, who's the adult, and who's the child here? Why is she so mad at him for getting kicked out of school again?
- Start reading Ch. 22 together. Notice Holden loves talking to Phoebe—he hates talking to everyone else. His tone is also much more natural, as if he's talking to you (the reader), versus when he talks to any other single character in the novel. Is he himself?
- "I couldn't concentrate too hot. Sometimes it's hard to concentrate." The unreliable, mentally unstable narrator comes out again. Why does he have trouble "concentrating" when Phoebe asks him what he actually likes? Why wouldn't he want to think about this? Avoiding something painful?
- The incident with James Castle, the boy who commits suicide at Elkton Hills—why does Holden relate to a boy who killed himself rather than "take back something he said"? Principles, standing to beliefs. Note that James fell to his death.
- Holden also relates to Allie—another child character who's dead.
- Stop when you get to the title passage: "I'd be the catcher in the rye and all." Tell students the number one rule of reading a novel: When you get to the section that talks about the title of the novel, stop and think. Read the passage aloud again.
- Put down the books. Pass out small group discussion handout (with picture of a rye field) and put streaming video of "Wheat and Wind" (a windswept rye/wheat field; online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed4gmlj0Cds>), preferably with Jami Seiber's "Tell It By Heart" playing in the background (listen online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOxWLxbiC5I>) on the overhead projector/computer screen. The rye fields are empty fields of nothingness, and you can't see what you're running into when you're in the rye. Have students think quietly for a few minutes, then pair up and talk about what they think the significance of the novel's title is.

Day 12: Small group discussion prompt



“Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody’s around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I’m standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they’re running and they don’t look where they’re going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That’s all I do all day. **I’d just be the catcher in the rye and all.** I know it’s crazy, but that’s the only thing I’d really like to be.”

What is Holden talking about in this passage? Why do you think Salinger chose this as the title of the novel? What’s the significance of being the Catcher in the Rye, and why is this the only thing that Holden wants to be?

Day 14: Do-now freewrite

“The mark of the immature man
is that he wants to die nobly for a cause,
while the mark of the mature man
is that he wants to live humbly for one.”

—*Wilhelm Stekel*

Mr. Antolini gives Holden this piece of advice on a sheet of paper. What do you think it means? What is Mr. Antolini trying to tell Holden? Which of our themes do you think it relates to most? Then put this piece of advice into your own words and write it on the bottom of this handout.

Day 14: Key reading points and general discussion questions:

Ch. 25 (p. 205)

- How has Holden responded to what happened with Mr. Antolini? Spiraling down into depression/a breakdown, seems more detached and alone than ever before. The “great fall” Mr. Antolini predicted? And why does he start talking to Allie, and telling him to not let Holden “fall”?
- Pick up reading with Holden spotting Phoebe wearing his hunting hat. Ask students to pull out their Hunting Hat Handouts—have they kept up? Take notes now, it’ll be an important symbol in the final moments of the novel.
- Notice how Holden has his mind made up, right until the moment Phoebe says she is going with him. Then his mind begins to black out and unfocus again—he can’t concentrate so hot—“I got sort of dizzy and I thought I was going to pass out.” Why is it like he’s fighting his mind here, now more than ever?
- How does Phoebe’s interaction cause him to react? Why does he want to hit her, then say “I’m not going away anywhere. I changed my mind. So stop crying and shut up.” Is he protecting her?
- “That’s one nice thing about carousels, they always play the same songs.” Remind students about Holden’s response to museums, how everything should stay the same forever.
- Pay special attention to when Phoebe gets on the carousel. “I was sort of afraid she’d fall off the goddam horse, but I didn’t say anything or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it’s bad if you say anything to them.” How is this a huge change for the Catcher in the Rye? Between Mr. Antolini and Holden, what does “fall” mean?
- When Phoebe gives Holden his hat back, why does he start crying? “My hunting hat really gave me quite a lot of protection, in a way.” When has anyone been kind to Holden throughout the novel? Who *hasn’t* used him in one way or another?
- Close with Chapter 26’s ambiguous ending. Hints that he’s changed, and hints that he still doesn’t fully understand what’s going on. “Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody.” What could that last line mean? Why would Salinger end the novel on such a line?