J.D. Salinger Essay, Research Paper

Born in 1919 to a prosperous Manhattan family, Jerome David Salinger grew up in a New York City milieu. Salinger s upbringing was not unlike that of Holden Caulfield, the Glass children, and many other characters used in his stories. Being a diligent student was never his first priority: after he flunked out of several prep schools, including the prestigious McBurney school, his parents sent him to Valley Forge Military Academy in Pennsylvania from which he graduated in 1936 ( J.D. Salinger , Novels 117). While attending a Columbia University writing course, Salinger had his first piece of short fiction published in Story, an influential periodical founded by his instructor, Whit Burnett. Salinger’s short fiction soon began appearing in Collier’s, The Saturday Evening Post, Esquire, and other magazines catering to popular reading tastes. Salinger entered military service in 1942 and served until the end of World War II, participating in the Normandy campaign and the liberation of France. He continued to write and publish while in the Army, often carrying a portable typewriter with him in the back of his jeep. After returning to the States, Salinger’s career as a writer of serious fiction took off. He broke into the New Yorker in 1946 with the story “Slight Rebellion Off Madison,” which was later rewritten to become a part of The Catcher in the Rye. Salinger quickly became one of the top contributors to the prestigious magazine. After The Catcher in the Rye was published, however, Salinger found himself at the center of a storm of controversy. His novel was lauded by many, but condemned by others for its language and social criticism. As it began to find its way onto the recommended reading lists of educational institutions, it also became the target of numerous censorship campaigns. The publicity gradually forced Salinger into a state of isolation. The years passed, and his continuing work on the Glass family saga drew increasing critical attacks from even those corners of the literary establishment that had once accorded him an almost cult-like reverence. He withdrew from publishing and public life altogether. His novel length story Hapworth 16, 1924, which once again revolved around an incident in the Glass family, appeared in the New Yorker in 1965; it was his last published work. Since the early 1960s, he has lived in seclusion in the state of New Hampshire. Reportedly, he continues to write, but only for his own satisfaction; he is said to be completely unconcerned with his standing, or lack of it, in the literary world. The Catcher in the Rye and much of Salinger’s shorter fiction shares the theme of idealists adrift in a corrupt world. Often, the alienated protagonists are rescued from despair by the innocence and purity of children. J.D. Salinger uses characterization and other literary elements in Franny and Zooey and style and theme in The Catcher in the Rye to reveal the theme of a sensitive individual searching for spirituality.( J.D. Salinger , Novels 117)

Franny and Zooey takes place over a long weekend in the fall of 1954 at an Eastern Ivy League college in New York City. The two main characters of this work are Franny and Zooey Glass. This novel unifies two related stories, both of which appeared in the New Yorker, in 1955 and 1957 (Harris 147). The protagonist Franny is Franny Glass. She is a twenty-year-old college student in the midst of a breakdown. She is an actress and an English Major, but has become turned off by college, both socially and academically. Zooey is the protagonist of the Zooey section of the novel. He is twenty-five years old and helps his sister through her spiritual breakdown. He is a television actor and the most popular member of the Glass family.

In Franny Franny Glass meets her boyfriend Lane Countell for a football weekend at college. Unfortunately, they do not get the opportunity to join in many of the festivities because Franny begins to have a breakdown during their first lunch together. All I know is I m losing my mind, Franny said. I m sick of ego,ego,ego. My own and everybody else s (Salinger, Franny 29). She then tells Lane that she is sick of the phoniness at school and of the egotism of the faculty. Franny has quit the play because she is embarrassed about what she considers to be acting fake. As Franny gets worked up, Franny reveals that she has began reciting the Jesus Prayer, a continuous prayer meant to cleanse one s spirit. Lane mostly brushes off Franny s concerns. Later, Franny faints in the bathroom and wakes up reciting the Jesus prayer. The Zooey section of the novel picks up where Franny left off. The author of Franny is Buddy Glass, one of Franny s and Zooey s older brothers. The story resumes the Monday after the weekend Franny s breakdown started, and Zooey is at home in New York City. In his conversation with his mother, Bessie Glass, it is revealed that Franny is now at home, sleeping and crying on the living room sofa. Bessie wants Zooey to talk to Franny, which he eventually does. During a long personal discussion, we learn that the two of them have been raised on a blend of different religions taught to them by their older brothers Buddy and Seymour. Over the course of this discussion, Zooey helps Franny sort out her spiritual and personal beliefs allowing her, by the end, to finally find peace.

Franny and Zooey features Salinger s two predominant concerns: the sensitive adolescent confronted with the ego and the unfeeling world, and a keen intrest in religion and spirituality. While Franny is praised for its structure and expert depiction of the college milieu and language, Zooey is often regaured as disffuse. Franny and Zooey remain two of Salinger s most important and sensitively drawn characters (Harris 349).

The Catcher in the Rye is Salinger s novel which made him known as a famous and controversial author. There are three narrators of the events of this book. The first is the author, J.D. Salinger who is angrily looking back at what has happened. The second is the seventeen year old Holden, still institutionalized telling the story as a past event. The third, and most immediate, is the sixteen year old Holden who does most of the narrating throughout the novel. The form of narration in which the novel is told is first person.

The book is rich in symbolism. The author hints about the title twice before it is revealed. The first time, Holden hears a little boy in New York singing If a body catch a body comin through the rye, (Salinger, The 132). The second time, Holden is with Phoebe and brings up the topic, referring to the song as If a body catch a body comin through the rye (Salinger, The 210). Phoebe corrects him but Holden s dream of being a catcher stays with him. He wants to be able to save the children from adulthood and disillusionment. Holden s red hat is a symbol that displays his self-conscious isolation from others. He wears the hat and keeps it with him when he is feeling insecure throughout the novel. At one point in the novel he gives it to Phoebe, but she gives it back knowing the significance it holds for him.

Alienation and loneliness is the main theme that runs throughout the novel. The novel tells accounts of a deeply troubled teenager who has to wear a red hat as a security blanket. When he wears the hat he still does not fit in, but he ultimately does not want to. Throughout the novel Holden constantly struggles with his immerging sexuality. He is unable to get close to or even to like any of the girls he meets. Instead, he simply writes them off as sex objects. He also shows disgust when he encounters other male perverts or morons. Confusion about his idenity is common for adolescents but for Holden it is terrifying ( J.D. Salinger , Novels 120).

Throughout the novel Holden continually sets himself up for failure and he is somehow able to be proud of it. He fails in every encounter relating to others with in the novel except for those with Phoebe. Holden uses failure as a way to attract attention to himself. He desperately desires attention from his parents because what he really wants is for them to accept him and love him for who he really is. Holden is deceitful and manipulative in most of his dealings with other people throughout the novel. Holden knows that he is a good liar and boasts of his power as a liar. Throughout the novel, another Holden is shown as one that feels sorry and wishes that he would not con as many people. I thought it was If a body catch a body, I said. Anyway I keep picturing 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- I mean if they re going I have to come but from somewhere and catch them. That s all I d do all day. I d 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. I know its crazy ( Salinger, The 157). This quote shows how caring Holden is and how much he truly wants to help others. It also shows a different side of him that is not revealed in the novel until he admits he is a failure. This portrays Holden not only as a failure, but also a deeply sensitive and compassionate person.

Holden was expelled from Pency for academic failure. After an unpleasant evening with his roommate Stradler, he decides to leave Pency for awhile and spend a few days in New York. Once in New York he begins to feel desperate and lonely because of the adult world which he was not yet ready for. Unable to see his sister Phoebe or his girlfriend Jane Gallaguer, Holden ultimately spends the evening with Sally Hayes. Increasingly lonely, Holden finally decides to sneak into his parents apartment so he can talk to Phoebe. He borrows some money from her, then goes to stay with his former English teacher Mr. Antolini. That night, at Mr. Antolini s house, he feels that Mr. Antolini is making a homosexual move towards him. Holden then leaves the apartment and spends the night at Grand Central Station. The next day, Holden experiences the worst day of his breakdown. He wanders the streets and looks for children. He tries to leave New York forever and hitchhike west, but when Phoebe insists on going with him he changes his mind. He instead decides to stay and watch out for her and protect her from the adult world. He then decides to take her to the park that always makes her feel happy. The novel ends with Holden refusing to talk, and reporting that he goes back to school the next year.

Salinger s Franny and Zooey and The Catcher in the Rye have many common characteristics. Salinger has almost identical themes running throughout both of the novels. The main theme that runs through Franny and Zooey is a deeply troubled, rebellious, and defensive teenager confronted with ego and the unfeeling world. Franny displays this when she struggles with ego and decides that the Jesus prayer will solve her problems. At the end of the novel, she is able to find peace with herself because of what Zooey has helped her to overcome. The main themes that run through The Catcher in the Rye are alienation and one of a deeply troubled rebellious teenager who is struggling with the adult world. This is displayed in The Catcher in the Rye by Holden wondering from place to place and not being able to find an environment which he is comfortable in. He also had to wear a hat as a security blanket because he thought it would protect him from the world. Salinger chose to have these themes run throughout his novels because they were real to him. He struggled with many of the problems in his life that he wrote about in these novels. Many critics believe Salinger s choice for a hero is essentially a religious problem, that is, the problem of finding a moral world (Levine 499). Many critics also say that The wit toughness, and sensitivity of the novel are typical of Salinger s work as its best. His characters seek the presence of grace in life even when they know the quest is an impossible one ( J.D. Salinger , Cassell s 455). Another similarity that Salinger has in his works is the setting. The Catcher in the Rye and Franny and Zooey are both set in the New York area. He writes the novels in these settings because they are settings that he is comfortable with and used to. He also uses the settings because they are where the problems that he encounted in his life took place.

Franny is very much like Holden without the cursing. Franny has a problem dealing with the ego and phoniness of other students, while Holden has a problem dealing with the happenings of the adult world. Zooey and Phoebe also have many common characteristics in that they both help alter the main characters. Franny and Zooey and The Catcher in the Rye both show Salinger s current theological and religious beliefs at the time that the novels were written. Many people that know him say Salinger has a way of working his current mental infatuations into his stories ( J.D. Salinger ,Cassell s 455). In both novels, Salinger uses a technique that is unique from many other authors through the use of his descriptive details.

J.D. Salinger uses characterization and other literary elements in Franny and Zooey and style and theme in The Catcher in the Rye to reveal the theme of a sensitive individual searching for spirituality. In Franny and Zooey, Salinger tells the story of some of the religious problems he encountered in his life. In The Catcher in the Rye, he illustrates to the reader some of the problems that he encountered during his teenage and early adult years. Both of these novels have the same main theme, which was that of a sensitive teenager having trouble dealing with the world. J.D. Salinger uses the events that have taken place in his life to write the novels Franny and Zooey and The Catcher in the Rye.