

The Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger
STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

1. Based on the first sentence of the novel, do you think Holden Caulfield will be providing every single detail of his story? Why or why not?
2. Holden is not going to tell readers his life story. What IS he going to tell them?
3. The way Holden talks about the Pencey Prep advertisements gets us started with Holden's personality. How does he feel about the advertisements? Why does he feel this way?
4. What's important about the day the story starts? What is going on with Holden and Pencey Prep? Why is this happening?
5. After telling the story of the cancelled fencing tournament due to Holden's actions, he says, "It was pretty funny, in a way." Is this a funny story? Do we really think Holden finds it funny? Or is he playing it off? What do you think?
6. In this chapter, Holden is trying to say goodbye. What does he say about leaving places? Is it better to know when you are leaving or not? What's his reasoning?

Chapter 2

1. Holden allows readers into his mind by adding commentary and streams of consciousness to his story. Readers see that sometimes his outer appearance might not match his inner thoughts. Find two quotes (what Holden says and what Holden thinks) that seem to contradict each other. Explain.
 - a. What Holden says...
 - b. What Holden thinks...
 - c. Explain how they conflict and what it says about Holden's character...
2. During his conversation with Mr. Spencer, Holden gets distracted thinking about ducks in Central Park in New York City. What are some things he wonders about them? What are some solutions that he comes up with while thinking?
3. When talking with Mr. Spencer, Holden reflects on a few reasons he hates growing old and old people. What are these reasons?

Chapter 3

1. Holden says, "I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life." As readers, how should we decide what to believe and what not to? How can we tell if Holden is lying to us or not while reading this novel?
2. Where does Holden get his red hunting hat? What's unusual about the way he wears the hat?
3. Who is Robert Ackley?
4. Describe the relationship between Robert Ackley and Ward Stradlater.

Chapter 4

1. Who is Ward Stradlater?
2. Who is Jane Gallagher?
3. What facts does Holden give about Jane when they play checkers? If a king is a powerful checker piece, why do you think she plays this way?

4. Twice in Chapters 3 and 4, Holden performs actions that he describes as “horsing around”. What are they? How do Ackley and Stradlater react to these actions from Holden?

Chapter 5

1. Holden Caulfield makes a snowball but ends up not throwing it at anything. Why does he decide against each target? What does this say about his character?
2. How did Holden break his hand when he was thirteen? What emotional event led to this action?
3. Describe (in as much detail as possible) the object that Holden chooses to write about for Stradlater’s composition essay.

Chapter 6

1. Describe how Stradlater acts on his dates with girls. Why then is Holden so curious (and nervous/concerned) about Stradlater’s date with Holden’s innocent childhood friend Jane Gallagher?
2. Why does Holden end up punching Stradlater in the face? Holden says he was aiming for Stradlater’s toothbrush. Do you believe that? Why or why not?

Chapter 7

1. One of the difficulties of reading a novel with a narrator like Holden is that readers aren’t sure how much to believe for real. Holden uses phrases like “prince”, “gentleman and a scholar”, and “you’re aces” to describe Ackley. Does Holden really feel this way about Ackley or is he being sarcastic? Whatever you choose, explain why you think this.
2. What split second decision does Holden make at the end of this chapter? What is he going to do tonight?

Chapter 8

1. What activity does Holden like to do at night by himself?
2. Who does Holden run into while on the train to New York City? What name does he give her? What do they talk about? How does he lie about this topic?

Chapter 9

1. What question does Holden ask the cab driver? (The cab driver thinks he’s crazy for asking.)
2. Looking out of his hotel window, Holden witnesses a cross dresser and people spitting water on each other. What internal conflict does Holden have about “crumby” acts?
3. Why does Holden call Faith Cavendish? What ends up happening?

Chapter 10

1. Describe Holden’s sister Phoebe Caulfield. What are some details he gives? Why does he seem to like her so much?
2. In Chapter 10, Holden says he was acting “strictly on hunger”, and later says, “I certainly must’ve been very hard up to even both with any of them.” What is Holden talking about?

3. In the Lavender Room, Holden tries to converse with the three women at the next table. How does it go? Why does it go this way?
4. In these chapters, readers get a glimpse of how lonely Holden Caulfield is. Create a list of people he tries to buy drinks for or tries to get to hang out with him in these three chapters.

Chapter 11

1. Who does Holden Caulfield sit down and think about while in a hotel lobby?
2. Describe the time Holden and Jane almost made out. Retell the story from Holden's perspective.

Chapter 12

1. What question does Holden ask the cab driver Horwitz?
2. Why does Holden think Ernie is a phony?
3. Why does Holden think Lillian Simmons is a phony?

Chapter 13

1. What's the name of the prostitute Holden has sent to his room?
2. What lie does Holden tell the prostitute about why they can't have sex?
3. What does Holden want to do instead of have sex?

Chapter 14

1. What do Holden and Maurice the elevator boy/pimp argue about?
2. How does the argument end? What is the resolution to the conflict?
3. While dealing with the resolution, what is Holden's day dream about what he desires to happen next? Be as detailed as possible.
4. What does Holden consider because he is so depressed? Why does he decide against it?

Chapter 15

1. What plans does Holden Caulfield make with Sally Hayes?
2. Where does Holden store his belongings if not in a hotel?
3. Why doesn't Holden like *Romeo and Juliet*?
4. How does Holden feel about his conversation with the nuns? Why does he keep offering money? Why does he feel badly at the end?

Chapter 16

1. Whom does Holden consider calling constantly?
2. Who does Holden search for at the park?
3. How does Holden react to the boy saying, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye"? Why do think that it?
4. When thinking about the natural history museum, Holden says, "The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. You could go there a hundred thousand times, and that Eskimo would still be just finished catching those two fish...Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be *you*. Not that you'd be so much older or anything. It wouldn't be that

exactly. You'd just be different, that's all...I mean you'd be *different* in some way-I can't explain what I mean. And even if I could, I'm not sure I'd feel like it" (121-122).

- a. What is Holden talking about at the history museum? Does he mean a real life Eskimo? What's going on?
- b. Going deeper with what we know about Holden, why do you think the museum would be so special (and symbolic) for him?
- c. How are people different each time they come to the museum? How does Holden feel about that?

Chapter 17

1. At the play with Sally Hayes, what does Holden Caulfield find annoying and phony about the actors on stage? (relates to Ernie and his talent as well)
2. What happens during intermission that also annoys Holden?
3. According to Holden, why does Sally really want to go ice skating?
4. What impetuous act does Holden suggest to Sally? Describe what his plans are.
5. What does Holden think happens to you after you go to college and get married? What happens to life's possibilities?

Chapter 18

1. Who does Holden call and make plans with to meet for drinks later that night? What is Holden's relationship to this person?
2. What does Holden do to kill time before drinks?
3. Why do Holden and Allie love the kettledrum player at Radio City so much?
4. What does Holden think about war? Does Holden think he could ever be in a war? Why or why not?

Chapter 19

1. What types of discussions did Luce organize while at Whooton? Give some details.
2. Luce asks Holden, "Is this going to be a typical Caulfield conversation?" What is a typical Caulfield conversation do you think?
3. What question about Holden's character does Luce ask twice?
4. Annoyed by Holden's immaturity, Luce decides to leave. Before leaving, what suggestion does he make to Holden? What does Luce describe would happen if Holden were to follow through with this suggestion?

Chapter 20

1. After Carl Luce leaves and Holden Caulfield gets drunk, who does he upset by calling them late at night?
2. Why does Holden keep striking out with women? Why does he keep at it do you think?
3. Why wasn't Holden at Allie's funeral?
4. Being at duck pond, what memory with his parents does Holden think of?
5. In Chapter 14, Holden admits he is an atheist. If that's true, according to Holden, what happens to Allie after his death?

6. If that is true, how do the ducks become more significant? The pond is half frozen and half not, just like Holden is no longer a child and not yet an adult. After looking at this scene with Holden thinking about Allie, what else could the pond and ducks possibly symbolize?
7. Where does Holden plan to go at the end of this chapter?

Chapter 21

1. Who does Holden watch sleep?
2. What does Phoebe pretend her middle name is?
3. What is Phoebe's reaction to seeing Holden?
4. Create a list of topics that Phoebe talks about with Holden.
5. What is Phoebe's reaction to finding out Holden has been expelled again? Does Holden share this reaction?

Chapter 22

1. What are Holden's excuses for failing his classes and getting kicked out of school? Provide some details.
2. How does Phoebe respond to these excuses?
3. What is the one thing Holden admits to liking?
4. Summarize Holden's flashback about James Castle at Elkton Hills. What happens? Why does it happen?
5. What job title does Holden want when he's older? According to Holden, what would the job description be? How is this symbolic of Holden's character?

Chapter 23

1. Who does Holden call?
2. Why is this person so important to the Elkton Hills memory from Chapter 22? What role did he play? Why does Holden appreciate this?
3. What type of interaction does Holden have with his parents in this scene?
4. Where does Holden plan to go after this?
5. What happens to Holden's red hunting hat?

Chapter 24

1. How does Holden feel about digressions? How is this reflected in his narration of the novel? How does Mr. Antolini feel about digressions?
2. What is Mr. Antolini worried about with Holden's future? What types of people have also had this thing happen? What is Mr. Antolini's advice as a solution?
3. Why does Holden leave Mr. Antolini's?

Chapter 25

1. Where does Holden go after Mr. Antolini's?
2. Describe Holden's physical health in this chapter.
3. Why does Holden go to his old school?
4. What does Holden do with the walls in his old school? What does this say about his character?
5. Why is Phoebe mad at Holden? What does he let her do to make up for it?

6. Why is Holden worried about Phoebe reaching for the golden ring on the carousel? Why doesn't he speak up? How does this relate to a major theme in the novel?

Chapter 26

1. Where is Holden? Where has he been telling this story from the whole time?
2. Why shouldn't you ever tell anybody anything?
3. Predict: Do you think Holden will put in an effort at his new school in the fall? Why or why not?
4. What are some major themes of this novel? (A theme is a message, not a general topic.)
5. What do you think the following symbols are all about?
 - a. Red hunting hat
 - b. Ducks
 - c. Natural History Museum
 - d. Carousel

Passing, Nella Larsen
STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

Part One: Ch 1-2

1. From whose perspective is this novel told? (Provide first and last name when you learn it)
2. Who does Irene receive a letter from?
3. What does the letter writer request? How does Irene feel about this request?
4. In Chapter 2, how does the time period compare to Chapter 1?
5. Why does Irene go to the Drayton Hotel?
6. While at the Drayton, when Irene thinks she is being watched by a stranger, what secret does she think the stranger has found out?
7. Who does this stranger turn out to be?
8. Why has it been so long since the two characters have seen each other? What have some rumors been in the meantime?
9. What does it mean “to pass”?
10. What does Irene promise to do at the end of Chapter 2, then regret and says she will not do?

Part One: Ch 3-4

1. What does Clare Kendry convince Irene Redfield to do? Why do you think Irene allows Clare to influence her so much?
2. Who else is at Clare’s for tea? What’s her story? What do Clare and this woman have in common?
3. What is Claude Jones’s situation? How do Clare and Irene view the situation differently?
4. What are Gertrude and Clare worried about with their children? Why does Irene not have this same concern?
5. Describe the (internal and external) conflict(s) that arises when John Bellew arrives.
6. Why do you think Irene chose to stay silent in Chapter 3?
7. In Chapter 4, Clare wrote a post script in her letter that says, “It may be, ‘Rene dear, it may just be, that, after all, your way may be the wiser and infinitely happier one. I’m not sure just now. At least not so sure as I have been.”
 - a. What “way” is Irene living?
 - b. Why might Clare think that is better?
 - c. What life did she previously think was better?

Part Two: Ch 1

1. After remembering “that time in Chicago”, Irene is still able to feel two different ranges of emotion very strongly (one expected, one surprising). What are they, and where does each one come from?

2. In Chapter 1 of Part One, Clare’s letter includes a line that says, “You can’t know how in this pale life of mine I am all the time seeing the bright pictures of that other that I once thought I was glad to be rid of.” Now, in Part Two, Irene finds herself unable to “sympathize with this new tenderness, this avowed yearning of Clare’s for ‘my own people.’”
 - a. What is it that Clare now wants?
 - b. Why do you think she wants this?
3. What is it in particular that Irene finds so attractive about her husband Brian Redfield? How does this characterize Irene and relate to theme?
4. Brian and Irene have the following conversation:

“They always come back. I’ve seen it happen time and time again.”

“But why?” Irene wanted to know. “Why?”

“If I knew that, I’d know what race is.”

(You will need to read beyond the above three lines to answer these.)

 - a. Who is this general “they” the couple is talking about?
 - b. What do they mean about coming back?
 - c. Why is Irene confused? What is Brian’s reasoning?
5. Describe Irene and Brian as a couple. What are their feelings on race? On Brian’s job? On living in New York City? On raising their children? (Be specific for these.)

Part Two: Ch 2-4

1. When Clare arrives to talk to Irene about not answering her letter, what are the reasons Irene presents against Clare’s involvement with the black culture of New York City?
2. Do you believe Clare is as lonely as she says? Why or why not?
3. In Chapter 2, what’s the year of the setting in Harlem revealed to be? Why is this an important time in New York City for blacks?
4. Why are events like the Negro Welfare League dance so well attended by both white and blacks? According to Irene, what reasons do both whites and blacks have for being in attendance at these events?
5. Why does Clare want to attend the NWL dance? Why does Irene decide to invite her?
6. Discuss how Hugh Wentworth’s dialogue is depicted in Chapter 3. How is it different from Irene’s? What is the significance of this?
7. Irene tells Hugh, “You’re so clever, you usually know everything. Even how to tell the sheep from the goats. What do you think? Is she?”
 - a. What is Irene asking? What does Hugh really want to know?
 - b. What does Irene say about being able to tell if someone “is” or not?
8. How has Clare and Irene’s relationship changed from the beginning of Part Two to the end of Part Two? Give examples.
9. Clare tells Irene, “Can’t you realize that I’m not like you one bit? Why, to get the things I want badly enough, I’d do anything, hurt anybody, throw anything away. Really, ‘Rene, I’m not safe.”
 - a. Do you agree that Clare would throw anything away to get what she wants? Even her daughter? What proof do you have to support this?

- b. When Clare says she is not safe, what does she mean? Not safe for herself or not safe for others? Explain your answer.

Part Three: Ch 1-4

1. After the war, Brian sometimes goes into depressive states. What's different about the one Irene worries about in Chapter 1?
2. Why doesn't Irene invite Clare to tea? Why does Clare show up anyway?
3. After learning why Clare shows up to tea uninvited, Irene says, "Clare Kendry! So that was it! Impossible. It couldn't be...Clare! How sickening." What does Irene believe she has just figured out? (It may take readers a while after these lines to truly answer the question correctly.)
4. When looking in the mirror, Irene calls herself a "damned fool." Why does she think this?
5. Why does Irene end up breaking a glass? Why does she lie to Hugh about how/why it happened even though she knows he might know?
6. In Chapter 1, Irene cares more about whose well-being than her own?
7. At the end of Chapter 2, what does Irene decide must happen in order to deal with Clare?
8. Describe what Irene means when she talks about being "caught between two allegiances." What are the allegiances? Why is she caught? Why is there a struggle?
9. In Chapter 3, how does John Bellew figure out that Irene Redfield is a Negro?
10. Name another solution to the "Clare problem" that occurs to Irene but she quickly dismisses.
11. In Chapter 4, what topic does Brian bring up at the dinner table? What reasons does Irene have for not wanting her sons to hear? What reasons does Brian have to disagree?
12. Unknown at the time, Irene comes to the actual realization of why she doesn't tell anyone about her run in with John Bellew. What is it? What would it mean for Irene if Clare was "free"?
13. Who crashes a party at David and Felise Freeland's apartment?
14. Is the ending of this novel a suicide, an accident, or a murder? Give reasons all three might be true and then pick the option you think is the strongest.
15. Why would Nella Larsen choose to leave the end of her novel this ambiguous?