

Excite to Write Winning Submission 2014

Name Ashley Wolanzyk

Lakeview High School and The Trumbull Career and Technical Center-grade 11

Instructor's name: Mrs. Polen

Breaking Through the Bubble: The Catcher in the Rye

Holden is in a bubble, a fragile, glass-like, solitary world of his own. Now imagine this bubble is floating on the ocean in the middle of a hurricane. The waves and wind jarring the perfect, innocent little bubble every which way and suddenly, Holden doesn't want to be in the bubble anymore. He thrashes, screams, pleads, and begs, but to no avail. The bubble is stuck in the dangerous stormy ocean and there is nobody and nothing that could be done to save him. Holden knows he will have to grow up and face the world. Sooner or later, he will be forced to accept the fact that children don't remain as children forever. But in this sense, Holden is perfectly okay with just watching the tragedies of adulthood from afar. He knows in his mind that the bubble isn't indefinite and that he can't always be a spectator. He knows that he will soon "pop" into a full adult. Likewise, Salinger uses windows and other symbols to show Holden's impending doom. Windows give Holden a glimpse, just like the bubble, of the outside world--the world that wants to brainwash him with the phoniness of adulthood. The window explains that Holden can't stay inside, protected by a thin plate of glass for the rest of his life. In the classic novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger uses the concept of ducks, a hunting hat, and a young man named Stradlater, to symbolize Holden's struggle between the innocence of childhood and the phoniness of adulthood.

Though Holden speaks very much like an adult when he rambles about sex appeal or swears constantly, his occasional conversations about ducks show his more curious and childish side. For instance, Holden asks several adults where the ducks go, which is viewed as childish because it seems like common knowledge to know that ducks migrate during the winter. Holden recalls asking a cab driver, "You know those ducks in that lagoon right near Central Park South? That little lake? By any chance, do you happen to know where they go, the ducks, when it gets all frozen over? Do you happen to know, by any chance?" (Salinger 60). Although Salinger did not directly state it, he intended for Holden's curiosity about ducks to symbolize his desire to protect the childhood innocence that they represent. In addition, the ducks symbolize the uncertainty of the future. Holden wondered continuously about the ducks and once again asked, "Well, you know the ducks that swim around in it? In the springtime and all? Do you happen to know where they go in the wintertime, by any chance? I mean does somebody come around in a truck or something and take them away[?]" (Salinger 81). Salinger emphasized that "somebody com[ing] around in a truck and tak[ing] them away" would mean that the fate of the ducks would be unknown, just like Holden's future life. Symbolism shows how in the spring the ducks are fine in the lagoon, and in the winter they have suddenly migrated and disappeared. This also corresponds with children growing into adults, such as Holden, and how he does not know where the future will take him. Similarly, the ducks don't seem to live on a timeline like Holden does. The ducks leave and return unchanged, frozen in time, just like Holden mentioned as he said: "I live in New York, and I was thinking about the lagoon in Central Park, down near Central Park South. I was wondering if it would be frozen over when I got home, and if it was, where did the ducks go" (Salinger 13). Salinger demonstrates how the ducks show a life that never changes or ends, and that they are idealistic to Holden, who would like more than anything to preserve his

youth. Altogether, the ducks in Central Park signify Holden's childish inquisitive instinct, an unknown future, and how change is sometimes only temporary.

A red hunting hat, bought on a whim in New York, became a perfect barrier between Holden and every corrupted, phony adult. For example, Holden admired the hat, viewing it as a new addition to his personality. It wasn't enough just to have an unusual red hunting hat, so he wore it in a different way as he explained, "The way I wore it, I swung the old peak around to the back--very corny, I'll admit, but I liked it that way. I looked good in it that way" (Salinger 18). Salinger symbolizes that Holden's unique accessory brings out the best in his personality and allows for the inner child in Holden to shine through. In addition, Holden feels alone and vulnerable all by his lonesome and seeks to use the red hunting hat to set up a protective front from the outside world. As Holden recalls watching Stradlater, he allows us to see deeper into the symbol lying behind the hat when he said, "I was sitting on the washbowl next to where Stradlater was shaving, sort of turning the water on and off. I still had my red hunting hat on, with the peak around to the back and all. I really got a kick out of that" (Salinger 27). As Salinger intended to show, Holden is able to relax and rest peacefully while being comforted by the hat, which symbolizes the protection from the evils of adulthood, such as Stradlater. Similarly, the hat also acts as a mental screen for Holden, literally and metaphorically filtering out the phoniness in his life. Holden recalled adjusting the hat when he became nervous while talking to Stradlater about his date as he said, "I pulled the peak of my hunting hat around to the front all of a sudden, for a change. I was getting sort of nervous all of a sudden. I'm quite a nervous guy. "Listen, where ya going on your date with her?"" (Salinger 34). Salinger intended to display that Holden hides underneath the brim of the hat--out of sight, out of mind--and hoping that he won't be burdened by adult matters, such as Stradlater and his date. Overall,

numerous symbols are represented by the famous red hunting hat as Salinger conveyed the ideas that it protects Holden, shows his individuality, and shields him from the phoniness of the adult world.

No classic novel would be complete without a little spice of hatred--the very hateful relationship of Holden loathing Stradlater because he represents his fears of growing up. For example, Holden watched Stradlater shaving and remarked on how annoyed he felt as Stradlater whistled and practiced bad hygienic habits. Holden claimed that, "The reason [Stradlater] fixed himself up to look good was because he was madly in love with himself" (Salinger 27). Salinger symbolizes that Holden expresses hate towards Stradlater because he represents manhood, a concept that Holden fears and fails to grasp. Also, Stradlater does not condone horse-playing or immaturity. In a scene where Holden wanted to wrestle with him, Stradlater was completely disgusted as he said, ""Cut it out, Holden, for Chrissake!" He didn't feel like horsing around [Holden remarked, about the incident]" (Salinger 30). It is evident that Salinger wanted to relay the thought of Stradlater representing a mature adult, which Holden refuses to be, in order to show how Holden fights to stay childish as he reaches adulthood. In addition, Stradlater symbolizes adulthood is by dating and getting women to like him. Holden isn't mature enough to entice a woman's affection as evidence proves when he says, "I kept thinking about Jane and about Stradlater having a date with her and all. It made me so nervous I nearly went crazy" (Salinger 34). Salinger demonstrates through Holden's words that certain thoughts about women and dating makes Holden nervous because dating represents a normal act of adulthood--the very adulthood which Holden tries to avoid. Overall, Salinger symbolizes that Holden hates Stradlater because he shaves, acts mature, and gets women, all aspects that represent the average adult male that Holden refuses to become.

In the everlasting conflict between childhood and adulthood in *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden develops multiple means of protecting and postponing his precious child self from venturing into an adult. Salinger displayed again and again how the ducks in Central Park, red hunting hat, and mature Stradlater convey both the struggles and peacefulness that Holden experiences with each aspect that the symbols represent. It almost seems as if indefinite means of symbolism continuously "shine through the window" towards readers. After all, Holden experienced an incredible journey throughout the novel, but we have learned that he can't always be surrounded, inside, looking through the glass, forever. At some point, we all need to step outside. . .

Works Cited

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