
The Valuable Lessons on the Journey of Maturity in "The Catcher in the Rye"

"Maturity comes from experience, not age" (Ziad K. Abdelnour). The coming of age story, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger takes some of life's most valuable lessons like overcoming adversities and the journey of maturity and wraps them all up into one novel.. Holden Caulfield endures more than most kids his age would in one weekend. Instead of heading home after his expulsion from prep school, he goes into New York City for a couple of days. There, he tries to reconnect with old friends and he goes places that evoke old memories. He also finds himself caught in some difficult circumstances where he comes face to face with his values. Each of these situations teaches him something that he will later benefit from. When Holden is forced to step back and reflect on what happened, he finally learns the lessons that he did not see at the time. Holden realizes that he shouldn't take things for granted while learning more about himself and his moral compass.

Before Holden leaves Pencey, he goes to say goodbye to his teacher, Mr. Spencer, who tries to warn him about his future.

"Do you feel absolutely no concern for your future, boy?"

"Oh, I feel some concern for my future, all right. Sure. Sure, I do."

I thought about it for a minute. "But not too much, I guess."

"[...] You will, boy. You will when it's too late." (Salinger 20)

Mr. Spencer is one of many who tries to warn Holden about this hole he's digging for himself. If he continues this way, he's putting his future in jeopardy. Holden's teacher fears Holden will realize his mistake too late and won't be able to fix it. Holden is taking his education at Pencey for granted but he does not see it that way. At the time, Holden is not able to grasp the full meaning of what his teacher is trying to tell him. However, when Holden finally gets help, he is able to finally take in not only what happened that weekend, including his conversation with Mr. Spencer. "D.B. asked me what I thought about all this stuff I just finished telling you about. I didn't know what the hell to say... About all I know is, I sort of miss everybody I told about". A running theme throughout Holden's story is taking things for granted. Holden says he misses everyone he talked about which ties into that theme. In a way, he took their company for granted, only to realize that once he finally gets help. A lesson that Holden presumably learns

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from this reflection and realization is to not take things for granted.

Throughout Holden's time in New York, he learns more about himself and his morals. When Holden is presented with the opportunity to have a prostitute meet with him, he is faced with his morals about respect as well as his "sex rules". "Look,' I said. 'I don't feel very much like myself tonight. I've had a rough night. Honest to God. I'll pay for you and all, but do you mind very much if we don't do it?' [...] The trouble was, I just didn't want to do it". When the option originally was given to Holden, he jumped at the chance to take it, hoping to get "practice" in. However, when the time came to really carry out his intention, he rescinded and doesn't follow through with what he said he would do. Holden chose not to follow through because it would go against his values to get intimate with a girl without caring for her. When he is in the sanitarium Holden comes to realize that not following through is something he has a tendency of doing. He mentions this when one of his psychoanalysts asks him about school. "I mean how do you know what you're going to do till you do it? The answer is, you don't. I think I am, but how do I know?". Holden learns by reflecting on his experiences that one can not always know for sure what they will do or how they will react in a given situation, just as he thought that he would gain sexual experience from his time with the prostitute but when it came time to finally doing it, he chose not to pursue the opportunity. He did not know that he would react this way when he initially accepted the offer. Holden learns by reflecting on this specific experience that decisions can be made impulsively but his morals will always be something that affect decision making.

While Holden benefits from reflecting on his own story, the reader can also benefit from seeing what he went through. I found that I was able to learn some of the same lessons that he did. For example, it was easy to relate to Holden realizing he took some people who used to be in his life for granted when he begins to miss them. While I cannot relate to the specific pain of taking time for granted with people, I can relate to taking opportunities for granted. Reflecting on some of my own personal experiences, there are some things I wish I had seized the opportunity and taken advantage of instead of letting the chance pass me by. However, as Holden was able to conclude, by reminiscing on missed people in his case, you'll end up missing them. In my case, I end up regretting the decision I made at the time. Leading into another lesson Holden learned, you never know what decision you will make until the time comes to make it. This is an aspect that I see in everyday life, making decisions in the moment is essential. No matter how much I plan for something, it's impossible to know what I could decide in the moment. Overall, Holden's lessons could not only be applied to his life after the sanitarium but they could be applied to the reader's life as well.

Holden's weekend in New York was something he will hold onto for the rest of his life. Throughout those couple days, he learned more about himself and his morals. However, when he decided to get help at the mental sanitarium, this is where Holden learned the most. Here, he spent ample time reflecting on the series of events that led him there. While in the beginning it

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most likely seemed like one of the worst things to ever happen to him, the life lessons of adversity, morality and taking things for granted will forever be something Holden will hold onto. When he was in New York, these lessons were not clear to him but once he could step back, away from his chaotic life, Holden is able to see what people were trying to teach him. By reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, I was able to connect with Holden and what he learns through his travels in New York.

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