***The Catcher in the Rye***

***Chapter 17***

**Holden’s experiences with Sally Hayes reveal a number of things:**

* **He continues to be conflicted over intimacy and sex. He is obviously attracted to Sally (dismisses her lateness because she looks so good, admiring her figure in her skating skirt, kissing in the back of the cab…).**
* **He admits (124) that he doesn’t really like her. As the chapter progresses, he becomes more and more annoyed with her. She strikes up a conversation with an acquaintance during the show’s intermission, and Holden regards this with contempt. Both of them were “phony” and their conversation made him want to “puke” (128). After the show, he says he “hated old Sally.”**
* **However, he also says that *“I felt like I was in love with her and wanted to marry her” (124).* The difficulty he has with reconciling these conflicting feelings is becoming more apparent. It culminates in him asking her to run away with him and get married (132).**
* ***“I swear to God I’m crazy. I admit it” (124).* This chapter is significant because Holden clearly begins to *display* signs of a breakdown. The reader can no longer rely solely on Holden’s perspective to explain things. Sally provides insight: *“Don’t shout, please,” old Sally said. Which was very funny, because I wasn’t even shouting” (130).***
* **Later she says: *“What? I can’t hear you. One minute you scream at me and the next you-“ (133).* Holden doesn’t recognize that the volume of his speech fluctuates as he expresses his frustration with his life and society. Holden lights matches as they sit there, and notices that Sally is looking about as they talk. Is Holden creating a scene?**
* **He hates how his life is unfolding. He hates living in the city, he hates school, he hates “phonies,” and he hates the idea of a mundane, routine adult life. His plans are spontaneous and idealistic, but impractical. Ultimately, they are child-like. When Sally points this out, using reason and logic (ie: the adult approach), he becomes depressed and lashes out at her (130-133). She is insulted and leaves. Holden alternates between apologizing and laughing. The chapter ends with Holden declaring *“I swear to God I’m a madman.”***

***Chapters 18-19***

* **Holden again thinks about Jane, and calls her but gets no answer.**
* **Carl Luce: slightly older. He is surprised that Holden contacted him (which indicates that he probably wasn’t that close with Holden, who admits that his address book is almost empty. This further emphasizes his loneliness).**
* **Luce agrees to meet him for a drink later in the evening. Holden kills time – sees a show, complains about it, and remarks on the annoying ways of people sitting around him.**
* **Luce was someone who impressed the younger boys at school with talks about sexual topics – including homosexuality. *It seems clear that Luce didn’t really know what he was talking about, but just showing off for the younger boys.***
* **Holden probably has this on his mind before Luce even shows up, remarking that a number of the men at the bar were “flits” – slang for gay. However, they didn’t *look* gay (by Holden’s standards), but he “could tell they were flits anyway” (142).**
* **Luce seems quite pretentious, and dismissive of Holden’s immature sexual references (the kind of thing they probably discussed back at school). There is also an indication that Holden is being loud (144).**
* **Holden momentarily rebukes Luce for an insulting comment about a former girlfriend that Holden thought was uncalled for (145).**
* **Holden is obviously lonely, because he is afraid that Luce might just get up and leave.**
* **Luce is involved with an Asian woman, and mentions that sex is a spiritual *and* physical thing for Asians (that Holden has no one else to hang out with is a sad commentary).**
* **Holden latches onto this notion, and tries to explain how it is central to his own feelings about sex and intimacy.**

***Chapter 20***

* **Holden’s breakdown continues. He becomes extremely intoxicated at the bar. Though he was careful to not act too “boisterous” (150), he behaves erratically.**
* **The call to Sally Hayes is sad and desperate. He drunkenly agrees to come over and help with her family’s Christmas tree – though the offer had probably been revoked already.**
* **People at the bar try to encourage him to go home – “No home to go to” (152). He cries inexplicably.**
* **Holden is drawn to the duck pond, and he gives further insight into his state of mind, and the difficulty he has had coping with his brother’s death.**
* **He wonders if he is coming down with pneumonia, and envisions the spectacle of his funeral.**
* ***We learn that he did not attend Allie’s funeral (he had to stay in hospital after he hurt his hand – it may have been more than a physical injury)* This is significant.**
* **The attention, the flowers…none of this matters when you are dead, believes Holden. He seems to wonder why people don’t get that kind of affection when they are alive.**

***Chapters 21-23***

* **Holden sneaks into his family’s apartment. His parents, he discovers, are not home. He enjoys looking through Phoebe’s things while she sleeps: *“I felt swell...I just felt good for a change” (159)***
* **Phoebe wakes up, and excitedly tells Holdenwhat she has been up to. However, she soon realizes he’s been expelled from yet another school. She becomes very upset.**
* **When Phoebe asks him why he disliked Pencey, Holden launches into a lengthy diatribe on why he thought the school was so awful. However, his sister confronts this cynicism: *“You don’t like* anything *that’s happening”***
* ***(169).* She is quite upset with him, and challenges him to name something he likes. His eventual reply of “Allie” doesn’t help matters. She said that didn’t count, though Holden admits he liked Allie “a thousand times” more than living people. Obviously, he is traumatized.**
* **(173) Holden reveals what he would like to be - though he admits it sounds crazy. He would like to be a “catcher in the rye”(remember how he heard the kid humming the song?). He envisions all these children playing in a field of tall rye near a cliff. As the only older person present, his job would be to catch the children if they were in danger of falling off.**
* **This is metaphorical. The rye field = childhood. The “crazy” cliff = adulthood. If they aren’t careful, the children might fall off the cliff. Holden is there to save them, to keep them young and innocent. Ultimately, Holden believes childhood is a precious time that must be protected. Adulthood is filled with compromise and disappointment.**
* **Phoebe corrects him: the lyric to which he refers is based on an old poem, and the line does not mention “catch a body”, but “meet a body.” This minor change affects meaning. Catch implies control, inequality. “Meet” is more neutral.**

***Chapters 21-23 (continued)***

* **(170) James Castle: a former classmate of Holden’s. Holden thinks about him while speaking to Phoebe. Castle killed himself after a shameful encounter with a group of boys. He refused to compromise or back down from their threats, and instead killed himself.**
* **Mr. Antolini: The only teacher who approached the mangled body of James Castle. He checked the boy for signs of life, and carried him to medical attention. This impressed Holden, as everyone else was too shocked to do anything. He calls the teacher, briefly explains the situation, and is invited over.**
* **Further emotional breakdown: Phoebe gives him some money (179). He gives her the hunting hat (a symbolic gesture).**

***Chapter 24***

**Mr. Antolini**

**A former teacher of Holden. He isn’t very much older than Holden’s brother D.B. Holden seems to like and respect him. Thinking about the suicide of James Castle caused him to think about Antolini, and he decides to give him a call. Holden is invited over.**

**He hears Holden’s story, and reveals that he recently talked with Holden’s father, who has been quite concerned. Antolini is worried about Holden: *“I don’t know what the hell to say to you...you’re riding for some kind of terrible fall” (186).***

**The fear is that Holden’s propensity for cynicism will be his downfall. Antolini actually echoes the fears of Phoebe, who accused Holden of not liking *anything.* She intuitively knew that such a position was unhealthy.**

**Cynicism is not productive, according to Antolini. The cynic can’t find anything in his environment that nourishes him, so he gives up looking. That’s when the bitterness seeps in. *This links in to Holden’s fascination with the ducks! Their environment became inhospitable for them - as Holden’s has become for him. His concern over their whereabouts represents his own unease: what will happen to me when my environment is unsuitable? Will I just disappear? Who will care about me?***

**Holden needs to find his direction, and pursue it immediately. Antolini thinks school is an obvious necessity for Holden. He would find others that have shared his opinions, and this would allow him to grow. To live is to age. The choice is: how do you want to age?**

***Did Mr. Antolini make a sexual advance towards Holden?* A case could be made for either side.**

***For...***

1. **His wife is apparently older - a marriage of convenience?**
2. **Invites a student to his apartment at a late hour.**
3. **Drunk - no inhibitions?**
4. **Tries to gain trust of family**
5. **Called him “handsome.”**
6. **Patted his head**
7. **Said he was “admiring” him.**
8. **Put the focus back on Holden: *“You’re a very strange boy” (193).***

***Against...***

**1. He was genuinely concerned about Holden.**

**2. He was close with Holden’s family.**

**3. He identified with Holden. Perhaps he saw some of himself in the boy (think DB’s writing)**

**4. His wife was in the apartment**

**5. The touching of the head could have been a genuine example of paternal-like affection (even though it would not really be appropriate, innocent or not - he was drunk, remember).**

* ***“That kind of stuff’s happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid” (193).* The meaning is unclear. Holden is initially shaken by the encounter, and immediately assumes it was sexual (which it may well have been). Also, we know he is prone to exaggeration. However, Holden could be alluding to past sexual abuse (There was a mention of something similar with James Castle). If so, that kind of experience would obviously affect one’s social and sexual development. It could certainly represent a loss of innocence. Such experiences could contribute to the development of cynicism.**
* **It could *also* be that Holden frequently mistakes people’s motivations, assuming things to be rooted in sex. This attitude could also affect development.**

***Chapter 25***

* ***“Maybe he* was *only patting my head just for the hell of it” (195).* Holden has second thoughts about Mr. Antolini’s motivations.**
* **More breakdown: he sees himself disappearing each time he steps off the curb, and asks Allie to protect him. He is not rooted to reality, as Mr. Antolini suggested, and is afraid he will just disappear - that his existence is meaningless.**
* **He fantasizes about running away and pretending he is deaf-mute, just so no one would talk to him.**
* **On the stairway in Phoebe’s school, he sees “Fuck You” written on the stairwell (201). It upsets him greatly, because of the corrupting influence it could have on the children who saw it. Some “dirty kid” would explain it, and it would upset them. He pictures himself murdering the person responsible, but realizes that he’d never really do that. Accepting this truth about himself upsets him.**
* **He sees more examples of profanity, some scratched right into the paint, and therefore impossible to remove.**

***“It’s hopeless, anyway. If you had a million years to do it in, you couldn’t rub out even* half *the “Fuck you” signs in the world. It’s impossible” (202).***

* **Such profane graffiti is everywhere. This is metaphorical. An individual cannot protect children from every corrupting influence in the world. There are too many. Also, growth implies a loss of innocence. So, such things are inevitable. Running away, hiding in the woods, the plans that Holden has in mind, are all irrational. He knows it.**
* **The Carousel: It is a ride for children. It is predictable, and goes around in a circle. A common feature was the *gold ring* that would be suspended from a post. As the riders went past, they could reach for it. The expression “reach for the gold ring” became somewhat of a familiar figure of speech. It means that in order to get something worthwhile, you must take chances.**

***“I was sort of afraid she’d fall off the goddamn horse...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...(211).* This is an important lesson: you cannot shelter children forever. Growing up means taking chances. Holden admits that witnessing this scene fills him with a happiness he cannot explain.**