

Taylia, Sean, Daylyn
Block 0
January 16, 2024

What can we say about Holden's feeling of isolation (and other ways it manifests, such as snobbery, superiority, inferiority, etc.) by considering the differences between what he says and what he thinks?

Throughout the novel "Catcher in the Rye" by J.D Salinger, Holden has many instances where his speech does not reflect the thoughts in his mind. This leads to his feeling of isolation which can be seen in his conversation with Mr. Spencer, his interaction with Sally, and his meeting with an old friend, Carl Luce. Each of these interactions showcase how Holden's words are contradictory to his thoughts resulting in his disconnection from others.

Holden first shows his feeling of isolation through the conversation he has with Mr. Spencer. In the lecture, Mr. Spencer begins to talk about life and mentions that "life is a game that one plays according to the rules." (8). After listening to his speech, Holden pretends to agree with him, yet his thoughts inform how he disagrees with Mr. Spencer's belief.

"Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right – I'll admit that." But if you get on the other side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game." (8).

Although Holden verbally agrees with Mr. Spencer, his thoughts reflect how he doesn't seem interested in facing challenges in life, like a player in a game. Holden's tendency to isolate his thoughts from others causes him to evolve into an intolerant character. He selectively blocks out other's opinions that conflict with his personal ideas.

Aside from his intolerant behavior, Holden's isolation is also shown when he is seen to believe certain values that set him apart from what society calls normal. Unlike the usual societal fantasy of

growing up in the adult world, Holden takes another stance in which he fears growing up. His inner thoughts on this topic are shown at the museum when Holden thinks that “certain things should stay the way they are” and are to be left alone in a “big glass cage” (122). However, his thoughts differ from his speech because when he speaks, he seems to only hint about his feelings about change. Holden often gets overly excited and is almost as if he is unaware that what he says is given a questionable look in society. This is shown when Holden speaks about his plan to live far away with Sally. He doesn’t specifically talk about how he doesn’t want to grow up in a risk situated adult society, but his exciting verbal expression contains elements of it. The conversation ends with Sally giving Holden the cold shoulder to his rapturous ideas, which once again brings out the fact that he is isolated because people don’t understand his feelings. This isolation leads to a snobby attitude since Holden acts as if he is always in the right. People do not agree with him, so he isolates himself in a world where he makes the rules. After the fight with Sally, Holden felt “fed up” with her and even called her a “royal pain in the ass” (133-134). Without mutual understanding, Holden brings out a snobbish attitude and puts blame on others which can fuel his isolation.

Holden’s feeling of isolation also comes from his inability to make deep connections with other people. Throughout the novel, he shows that he thinks highly of himself and believes that most people wouldn’t be able to engage in any meaningful conversation with him. It’s evident that he has a superiority complex and an example of this is his conversation with Carl Luce. Throughout their conversation, Holden makes attempts to discuss personal and serious matters with Luce, but Luce isn’t as keen to continue this topic and is dismissive of him. “You could tell he didn’t feel like discussing anything serious with me. That’s the trouble with these intellectual guys.” (144). Holden for once finds someone that can handle a conversation with him, unlike those at Pencey such as Ackley and Stradlater, only to be met with Luce not being interested in him. As their night together ends and Luce gets up to

leave, Holden tries for him to stay. "Have just one more drink," "Please. I'm lonesome as hell. No kidding." (149). He makes a desperate attempt to get Luce to stay; Unfortunately, Luce isn't interested in what Holden has to say and is adamant on leaving, feeding into his feeling of isolation.

Analyzing Holden's contrasting words and thoughts, it is apparent that a sense of isolation is developing in forms of superiority, snobbery, and intolerance to others. This is evident in the text when Holden brings out his narrow-mindedness in response to Mr. Spencer's metaphor about life as well as his struggle to make connections with others such as Carl Luce and Sally Hayes. Holden's isolation is also shaped because of his abstract take on life and growing up in the adult world. Thus, J.D. Salinger highlights the impact of isolation through Holden's perspective, emphasizing the internal difficulties he experiences.

Citation:

Salinger, JD. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, Limited, 1951. Print.