



## Question: 1

## The catcher in the rye

By J.D Salinger

Whilst reading the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D Salinger, one is immediately drawn to the most important aspect of this novel and that is the careful characterisation and imagery Mr. J.D Salinger constructs in the mind of the reader. In the following essay three characters Phoebe Caulfield, Stradlater and Jane Gallagher will be discussed. The author, Salinger constructs their characters through the use of events, what they do, what they say and how they are described by Holden in his personal account of his life.

Chapter 9 is the first time Holden describes his sister Phoebe, here Salinger uses Holden to describe Phoebe as young and innocent (Salinger 2010:73) “she’s only ten” Holden says. Further more we learn that Phoebe is smart, loves poetry, reading and writing perhaps her attempt to liberate her thoughts in her imperfect home. Holden describes the type of clothing his mother would buy her indicating that Phoebe is raised in a very wealthy home while the description of her blue pajamas with elephants on the collar gives the imagery of her childhood the very childhood her brother longs to preserve. Holden also mentions that Phoebe is affectionate type of person stating (Salinger 2010:73) “the trouble is she’s a little too affectionate” here Salinger gives the impression that Phoebe might be Holden’s safe haven, a place where he finds refuge when everyone else has judged him or only partially accepts him, Phoebe embraces her brother and reflects the innocence of a ten-year-old child who lives free of prejudice. Her love for her brother is also portrayed when she gives him her last Christmas money demonstrating a kind, loving spirit. Towards the end of the novel in chapter 25 Phoebe goes to the extent of packing her clothing in a bag and begging Holden to take her with him when he decides to head west away from his family, this shows her adventurous side to her character, that she does not fear the outcomes of her decisions and stands with her brother.

In contrast to Phoebe’s soft innocent character Salinger allows Holden to introduce his senior roommate, Stradlater. In chapter 3 Holden describes Stradlater as (Salinger 2010:26) “all right”, conceited and (Salinger 2010:26) “very generous in some things”. Salinger reflects Stradlater’s character through his actions as well as how he interacts with his peers, chapter 3 demonstrates exactly that, when Stradlater asks, (Salinger 2010:27) “how bout lending your me your hound’-tooth jacket?” and request Holden to complete an assignment for him thus showing his self-centred personality where he puts himself first before others. He shaves twice for perfect clean look however his razor is rusted and lacks basic toiletries, he wants to look good on the outside but has many flaws and uses his peers to make up for his shortcomings, signalling a pretentious character. Surprisingly Holden tolerates Stradlater, in chapter 4 - (Salinger 2010:29) “I was sitting on the washbowl next to where Stradlater was shaving” an indication that Holden subconsciously gravitates to the popularity, the sense of superiority and longs to possess that kind of attention. Holden shows some sort of respect perhaps a degree of fear, he goes ahead, completes the assignment as requested and lends his jacket to Stradlater, giving the impression that Stradlater is a demanding type of person who gets what he wants when he wants. Stradlater constantly flaunts his perceived sense of power,

controlling behaviour, above average attitude and known to only dates girls who were equally popular, Jane Gallagher was that type of girl, however she also possessed high qualities.

In chapter 11, one gets a deeper understanding of who Jane is. Holden mentions that she is not the prettiest girl he has seen but she is funny, intellectual, loves books and sports. Jane shows a reserved character in chapter 11 when Holden mentions, (Salinger 2010:86) “She sort of wouldn’t let me get to her mouth” then referring to Stradlater, (Salinger 2010:87) “I knew she wouldn’t let him get to first base with her”. Salinger allows Holden to share a specific event in chapter 4 (Salinger 2010:33) where Holden reminisces on a game of checkers “she wouldn’t move any of her kings”, “she’d just leave them all lined up in the back row”, this reveals to the reader that even though she had the opportunity to win the game by using her kings, winning was not her first priority but rather how the board looked. Salinger uses this metaphor to give the impression of Jane being a perfectionist. This perfectionism coupled with self-discipline is reflected in her daily, punctual attendance to her ballet lesson regardless of how hot it was, Holden says, (Salinger 2010:33) “She use to practice about two hours every day, right in the middle of the hottest weather and all.” Salinger allows Holden to portray her as part of the upper class, we get this idea from chapter 11 where Holden sets the scene where he sees Jane (Salinger 2010: 83) “laying on her stomach next to the swimming pool” as well as noting that Jane’s mother drives a LaSalle convertible. Holden gravitates towards Jane’s character as she embraces him much like his sister would do, by accepting him for who he is.

In conclusion, Salinger, through the use of Holden introduces many characters, some characters such as Stradlater are revealed through their actions and interaction with other characters while, Jane and Phoebe’s characters are constructed through both Holden’s description and what these characters do, the later being a more reliable depiction of the character as a whole.

Dear Ms Nelson,  
Thank you for your effort in presenting this essay which presents a good argument. Well done!  
Good articulation of language and well supported with quotations. 36/50

## Question 2:

## When Rain Clouds Gather

By Bessie Head

In the novel *When rain clouds gather* by Bessie Head the main focus lies in the village of Golema Mmidi where people were subjected to many trials and tribulations, exposed to both fruits and fury life had to offer. Thus In reading and understanding the novel I would concur with Paul Zeleza's description of the village as the village was not a stranger to struggle and faults. The following essay will elaborate these very elements and complexities, the growing pains of a village many called home.

Makhaya the, protagonist in the novel, was warmly welcomed into the village like a nurturing mother would to a battered son. Peace and serenity overflowed and was admired by Makhaya, a stranger to the harmonious atmosphere, chapter 6 reveals (Head 2008:84) "Makhaya was in the habit of coming to watch the sunset" and (Head 2008:84) " As his eyes became more and more accustomed to the particular beauty of Botswana sunsets." Makhaya loved the daily life of the village, what seemed normal to its inhabitants were blessings to Makhaya "Botswana goats amuse me they just walkabout eating all this dry paper and bits of rubble and then turn into meat and milk. This draws our attention to the element of tranquillity and simplicity Golema Mmidi had to offer, the healing Makhaya needed.

This beauty and splendour often drowned out the obvious burdens the village endured. It included the poverty and greed under the ruling of paramount chief Sekoto and sub-chief Matenga. The poor people were particularly vulnerable trading their dignity, and liberty for survival, we read evidence of this in chapter 2 (Head 2008:20) "because he was the chief he lived off the slave labour of the poor, he was washed, bathed a fed by the poor in return he handed out old clothes and maize rations." The chief could not live without greed, even though he was kind at heart he always thought highly of himself. In chapter 12 he degrades the poor (Head 2008 :206) "They lived such stupid lazy lives. They were so filthy in their habits that a mud hut was all they deserved." This emphasis the existence of callousness and cruelty as well as poverty and greed, the pure disregard of human rights.

In the midst of a cloud of poverty hanging over the village people still had hope and were good to each other. Mma- Mmillipede, Gilbert, Makhaya and Dinorego were amongst the good and unselfish people of the village. They invested their time, shared knowledge and helped better the lives of the people. Mma-millipede for example was the motherly figure Makhaya needed, chapter 5 (Head 2008:77) "about all these small things she chattered in her motherly way and they seemed like mansions of affection to lonely Makhaya." Gilbert and Makhaya were seen as the healers of an ill-equipped nation, with his good intentions and vision he had bandaged the wounds of the village and slowly gained strength through his learned practical and systematic farming methods. On the contrary the evil and manipulative character of chief Matenga reigned in the mansions of Golema Mmidi Matenga only had his best interest at heart regardless of the suffering his people had endured. Chief Matenga selfishly and intentionally denied their requests to develop the land and constantly portrayed

good people as evil chapter 12 (Head 2008:202) “the Matengas and the chief Sekotos did not have to lift up spades and dig the earth. It costs them nothing to say yes, yes, yes, build your dam because we have no water in this country. But it gave them deep and perverted joy to say no, no, no.” This represents the complexity of good and evil Paul refers to as well as the ordinary people terrorized by chiefs.

The evil works of the chiefs, the slaves hard work they enjoyed, the country’s administrative issues, the incorrect farming methods and the drought that threatened the village were amongst the chaos Gilbert and Makhaya were faced with chapter 2(Head 2008:28) “Three years of uphill battling had already made clear to him his own limitations in putting his ideas across to people”. Gilbert strived towards order in the village, he knew it would not be an easy task but with the help of Dinorego, Makhaya and many others he managed to pave the way unselfishly to the benefit of the community. This highlights the struggle between chaos and order.

Traditions and customs were also part and parcel of the problems Gilbert faced. Both men and women religiously practiced their roles and responsibilities however, these customs had oppressed women. The making of fires for porridge and tea, cooking cleaning working and raising children were the sole responsibility of the women in the village. One might argue that women were given the option of educating themselves and better themselves as we see in chapter 6 (Head 2008 :83) “The eight- year- old girl, named Lerato, was thus able to for most of the year to attend the village primary school, while the boy, Isaac was tied to the cattle post and received no education at all.” However, I bring your attention to chapter 8 (Head 2008:117) “No men ever worked harder than the Batswana women, for the whole burden of providing food for their families rested with them.” Where clearly women were not treated equally to men. This was a strange phenomenon to Makhaya, who made attempts to change these traditions chapter 10 (Head 2008:184) “All these rotten customs are killing us, can’t you see I’m trying to carry your burdens?” This highlights the element of tradition and change as well as the world which women are subjugated by men.

As we see the same village that empowered women restricted their ability to grow. Many women feared their husbands and were not at liberty to partake in any social activities or labour without permission from their husbands, chapter 8(Head 2008:116) “twenty more had been willing to join the tobacco-growing project, but they first had to get permission from their husbands.” This explains the element of oppression of women in the village. These were not the only fears that existed in the village, Paulina was adventurous, persuasive, strong and ambitious she also radiated a threatening demeanor which Maria had a fear of, her intimidating aura had made her feel hostile chapter 8 (Head 2008:131)” She looked across at Paulina with hostility. She really feared her as a woman.” Thus, emphasising fear and intrigue within the village.

Maria was one of the characters that represent both conformity and apathy she did what her traditions and customs expected from her and never deviated, she cooked and cleaned and obeyed the commands of her father. Maria was the obedient type and her hospitality never seized to impress the visitors her father brought home. Maria’s father had high expectations of her, she also had dignity and self- respect chapter 2 (Head 2008:26) “she bent her knees in a slight curtsy”, busy, preoccupied, self-absorbed women...poised serious, quiet face” was

the description Makhaya gave us and it was this that attracted him to her. This description of Maria exposes the elements of conformity and apathy.

Many changes occurred since the arrival of Gilbert in the village, more specifically he changed the lives of many through better farming, not only for the people but for the animals as well. Gilbert became a life line for many including Makhaya, he preserved and improved life. However not all was milk and honey in the Golema Mmidi, death stained the air on two occasions, one when Paulina's son had died and when chief Matenga had taken his own life, both occasion shook the village and brought about change. This brings to the surface the element of life and death.

To conclude, the village of Golem Mmidi was home to many people with diverse backgrounds, personalities and skills with many possibilities and potential. While the village served as a place of refuge for Makhaya it simultaneously served as an opportunity for exploration and growth to Gilbert. The community faced many internal and external battles, among them were depression, pain, and loneliness as well as evil, greed and corruption respectively, however, these challenges never outweighed the impact neighbours and the support of family and friends had on one another - a restoration of faith in humanity.

This essay delivers a good argument but the introduction could have mentioned the content of the statement.

Well presented and expressed despite a few careless errors in the introduction. Wishing you well in your studies. J Blakey 38/50

### **Bibliography**

Salinger, J.D. 2010. The Catcher in the Rye. London: Penguin.

Head, B. 1972 (rpt. 2010). When Rain Clouds Gather. London: Virago press.

## Plagiarism declaration

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