Comparison Between Holden Caulfield, His Struggles, And Those Of The Teenagers In The 1950s

Thesis Statement

The Catcher in the Rye was written in the 1950s by J.D. Salinger, who invented the controversial character Holden Caulfield, who reflects the teenage perspective of many 1950s teenagers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this paper is to draw and evaluate a comparison between Holden Caulfield, his struggles, and those of the teenagers in the 1950s.

Introduction

With World War II came many changes in American lifestyles. Men and women enlisted in the military, workforce labor demands drove people out of their homes, and the war's end caused an economic boost. The Post-War time period takes place after World War II's end. Women stopped working to be at home with their husbands, who had returned from war. Suburban living made a need for buying houses. With all of this, a new American lifestyle was born. The economic boost after the war caused many other problems for Americans, who were optimistic for change at first but soon grew weary of the new challenges they faced.

The 1950s and 1960s brought social tensions. Abroad, tension that would cause the Cold War arose, which lead to twenty years of tension between the world's most powerful countries. America also faced fears fueled by the Red Scare, leading many to be afraid of the communist infiltration into the United States. In the 60s, new styles emerged, the Civil Rights and Feminist movements arose, citizens did not trust the government, and the arts and entertainment industries began to evolve.

Other art had room to grow when new technology, like the television, arrived. African American athletes, for the first time, could participate in sports. Theatre and music crossed between genres and rock and roll emerged. Many veteran authors, such as Hemingway, wrote more work, as well as new novelists and poets who emerged with the time. More than the Romantics before them, the Post-War period reflected many ethnic and social backgrounds.

Activism writers, such as conservatives, conformists, Civil Rights abolitionists, Feminist reformists, and Vietnam War protesters wrote criticism and aided new cultural revolutions. Authors who were overlooked became popular; diversity unified Americans and preserved elements of the time periods before them. Influenced by the historic events around them, such as Hiroshima bombing, led t dark comedies and realistic writing. Naturalistic views were not too slow for the pace of American life. Outsiders like Holden Caulfield were the characters featured in obscurest novels wrote to degrade physical and moral characteristics.

A Brief History Of The Famous Recluse

Jerome David Salinger was born on January 1, 1919 in New York City parents Sal and Miriam Salinger. He was their second child and only son, and the family moved around a lot in his childhood. He attended Manhattan public school until his teen years, when his parents sent him to Valley Forge Military Academy. There, he was an average student and participated in the literary magazine, drama, and glee club, even writing a school song. Other students recall him as “somewhat pretentious” in manner and “sort of sarcoidotic”. After high school at Valley Forge Military Academy, he attended three different colleges, receiving no degrees throughout this journey. He then spent a year in Europe at age 19 before joining the army from 1942 through 1946, where he spent two and a half years overseas in Europe. He was also in the fourth Infantry division as staff sergeant; he experienced five total campaigns in his time from the D-Day to the end of the war. After his time in the military, he moved to Westport, Connecticut.

Salinger was known for his reclusive personality. He was always known for liking his privacy, wanting the public to know only the straightforward information, no more and no less. This was such a large belief that he had tried to prevent authors from writing biographies about him. This led to a lawsuit grounded on infringement of copyright, which Salinger won.

He has been writing since he was fifteen years old. His first story was published in 1940 at age twenty-one in the literary magazine Story. This still felt like a late start for the fast-paces American lifestyle. However, even Salinger has talked about his success, even saying that “[his] short stories have appeared in hundreds of magazines over the last ten years” (“Salinger, J.D. (Jerome David) 1919-“). Among these literary magazines were Saturday Evening Post, Esquire, and The New Yorker, all of which were renown fiction publishers. Salinger wrote the controversial novel The Catcher in the Rye, published in 1951. Other works he wrote include Nine Stories, published in 1953; Franny and Zooey, published in 1961; and Raise High the Roof Beam, published in 1963. His last story was published in The New Yorker in 1965, but there are theories that he published more under pseudonyms.

Many critics believe that The Catcher in the Rye’s popularity was based on people’s curiosity about its author. His silent and elusive manor was reflected in Holden Caulfield. Salinger would not talk or write about his life, and he did everything in his power to keep privacy invasion at bay. However, people wanted to learn more about him. These facts can be found in his scenes and characters that relate to his actual life and events in it. The first story with Holden Caulfield was published in The New Yorker and paved the way for the publishing of The Catcher in the Rye. Because of his elusive character, people read his book out of curiosity. Then, Salinger’s hold on cultural imagination took place. The book even unfortunately inspired the killing of John Lennon. 1954 gained a new wave of attention when Catcher got published in translated copies. Salinger then shied away even more from people, refusing to answer questions about his marriage of children, but he wrote more stories.

Holden Caulfield Then And Now

The novel’s initial reaction was not great. Some critics said it was ‘just about flawless’, while others said the opposite. However, copies sold well, even great. Catcher became a New York Times bestseller and stayed on the list for thirty weeks. However, even once it was off the

Bestseller list, it was never out of the public's eye. High schools and colleges became involved in 1954, when the paperback was published and sold. That same year, more attention was called to the book from other countries, when the book was published in nine new languages.

The 1970s brought the pinnacle of Salinger's criticism. Critics claimed that it had censorship issues. Before Catcher, there is no formal record of censorship in the United States. Christian publications condemned Salinger for being immoral and perverse. This set the tone for formal censorship in the United States. In 1960, the book was removed from public libraries and recommended reading lists in high schools.

Meanwhile, people called the book both amazing and immoral. In schools, it became the most widely read book from the Post World War II American era. However, it has also been the most banned. People and critics grew increasingly more interested in his works, while Salinger himself grew more elusive and provoked people to read to find out the information they yearned for. Critics said that it created an engaging, realistic, and observant message. However, other critics disliked it and claimed that, for a talented writer, it came off as excessive, amateur, and had course language. They also said it was 'heartburn' and had 'no point of view'.

Holden Caulfield has always had opposers and supporters. The original publication was turned down by the publishing house because they could not tell if Holden was supposed to be insane or not. People mocked his shallow nature and relatability to young readers, as well.

Manu believes that Salinger made Holden in the essence of "our most immature selves and asks means to achieve him" (Engel 110). Critics who hate the novel share in the blame for its increasing popularity. While critics put out contradicting reviews, the 1960s teens loved Holden Caulfield. They saw themselves in him. Critics felt that his skeptic, trashy nature went well with the post-counterculture generation. Kids now are more together and joining than those of the 1960s in relation to cultural environment.

Today's children just do not feel the same as those of the 1960s. The 1951 publication is still a staple of high school curriculum, but teens just do not feel the same about it. Classes describe fans as "holden-loving losers" (Schuessler). Shuessler believes that Holden has become a "victim of current trends in applying ever more mechanistic approaches to understanding human behavior" (Schuessler). Today, there is not as much of a search for adolescence, intuition, empathy, mystery, and deliverance from talking to another person. Kids now see him as whiny and dislike his sensitive nature. Like critic Stephanie Savage said, "you can either go to the carousel in Central Park, or you can choose the Wicker Bar. You can have a skating date, or you can have a prostitute come up to your hotel room. There's really not that sense of teen culture that there is now" (Schuessler). Critics believe that Holden is less popular today because of our impotent nature with ideas of quest for identity and meaning that Holden Caulfield represents.

Conclusion

J.D. Salinger's audience of teen boys was built around their 1950s personality. Teenagers back then felt more of a search for who they were and how to keep who they used to be threaded into that. They had more of a sense of empathy than teenagers today because of the environment and tragedies they grew up around. Perhaps Holden would have felt more included if he grew

up in the 2000s instead of the 1950s. Salinger catered to teen boys of the 1950s because there was not a cultural entertainment complex like we have today. Teens then felt like Holden did, somewhere between adulthood and childhood wants and cravings.

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