Holden Caulfield As The Main Protagonist In The Novel The Catcher In The Rye

Holden Caulfield is the main protagonist in the J.D. Salinger novel, The Catcher in The Rye. Throughout the novel, Salinger portrays Holden as an adolescent that is trying to find a sense of identity as an adult. During Holden's identity crisis, the reader picks up that his actions and feelings are unusual. Holden frequently smokes cigarettes and consumes a copious amount of alcohol that leads into a depression where he doesn't apply himself at school and has no real purpose in life. Many adolescent teenagers deal with the transition phase into adulthood, but can Holden's portrayal of his life be seen as abnormal from typical adolescent by psychological standards?

Holden experiences things that are abnormal within the life of a teenager, but the way he copes with this is detrimental from a normal teenage behavior. The struggles cognitively at school, dealing with emotional grief from the death of his brother, the excursions he experience socially, and the longing of friends and family that affects his behavior within society. While he has experienced these situations, the behaviors are abnormal based on psychological standards.

Adolescence is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. Children who are entering adolescence are going through many changes. Adolescence begins at puberty, which now occurs earlier, on average, than in the past. The end of adolescence is tied to social and emotional factors and can be somewhat ambiguous (Cleveland Clinic). Holden's adolescence is fleeting from him throughout the novel, and deals with losing his adolescence by engaging in careless actions, and harmful thoughts. In the novel, Holden is writing an essay about his brother's baseball mitt and has nostalgic memories about him from childhood on page 43, "I wrote about my brother Allie's baseball mitt...The thing that was descriptive about it, though, was that he had poems written all over the fingers and the pocket and everywhere...so that he'd have something to read when he was in the field and nobody was up at-bat." This emotional feeling of grief is appropriate in dealing with the loss of a loved one, because the memories with that person can bring on positive attributes of joy, for example laughing, encouragement, and pride. In essence, the memories of Allie give Holden peace, but makes Holden feel inferior to Allie. The reader learns of this in page 43, "You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent." The emotions that Holden exudes is normal for teenagers, but the actions after learning of his brother's death makes Holden abnormal on page 44, "I was only thirteen, and they were going to have me psychoanalyzed and all, because I broke all the windows in the garage." Holden's abnormal actions makes him not a typical adolescent, because this would cause a downfall with the connections of friends and family.

Holden briefly speaks of his family during the novel, but the reader is given very detailed descriptions of his friends and people around him. A good comparison of this disparity is in chapter one, "my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them...Old Selma Thurmer- she was the headmaster's daughter- showed up at the games quite often, but she wasn't exactly the type that drove you mad with desire." The descriptions of people make Holden normal, but what makes him abnormal is that he doesn't want to be around anyone. According to the Georgetown Behavioral Health Institute, normal

teen behavior for social interactions is, “Wanting to spend more time with peers and less time with family.” During the novel, Holden loves to be around his friends and peers more, because he wants to feel like an adult. What makes Holden abnormal in this case of social interactions according to Georgetown is, “Not wanting to spend time with either family or friends and shunning all social activity.” Holden’s relations with friends may not be the best, but can this have an effect on him at school?

Holden goes to Pencey Prep high school at the start of the novel, but the reader finds out that he has been kicked out of Pencey and some other high schools. According to the American Psychological Association, “Most adolescents still need guidance from adults to develop their potential for rational decision making.” Holden seeks help and learns from the people he meets, but those interactions were harmful or didn’t improve his self-worth.