Symbolism In The Catcher In The Rye

Holden Caulfield isn’t like an ideal teenager. He does things other teenagers will never think of doing at a young age, like smoking and drinking. Throughout the book, Holden mentions many things that represent something to him. He also mentions the fact that he does not want to grow up. The museum, the carousel, and Jane represent Holden’s innocence and coming of age.

The museum represents Holden’s innocence. Before meeting Sally for their date, Holden stopped by the museum and wondered if things changed. However, he refused to go inside. Holden said “I wouldn’t have gone in for a million bucks” [Salinger,136]. Holden’s current mindset is suicidal and depressed. He believes that there are many good memories in the museum so if Holden goes inside he will ruin those memories. Those innocent childhood memories will be ruined by his depressed and suicidal feelings. They would be ruined if he went inside the museum.

The carousel represents Holden coming of age or maturity. Holden said that he wanted to be the catcher in the rye but he soon realized he can’t stop kids from coming of age. This was after seeing all the fuck you’s written everywhere. Holden saw that, ’’ Somebody’d written fuck you on the wall’’ [Salinger, 221]. The fuck you’s represented that not everyone can be saved from growing up just like Holden’s desire. It also represents that lack of innocence which made Holden angry since he cherishes the children's innocence According to the text,’’ I felt so damn happy all of a sudden’’[Salinger, 233]. After realzing he can’t stop every kid from coming of age and he saw Phoebe on the carousel he was really happy because those are the type of moments Holden treasures as a kid. For the first time in his life, Holden was acting like an adult. The carousel also represented the innocence of children. Also, Holden watching Phoebe and not getting on it showed him coming of age and being an adult.

Just like the museum Jane represents childhood innocence. Holden and Jane were friends when they were younger and they shared some moments together. According to the text,’’ I couldn’t get her off my mind’’ [Salinger, 37]. Holden really liked Jane. His former roommate Stradlater is a player so him taking Jane out on a date killed Holden. Holden knew that if she had sex with Stradlater his innocence would be run. Holden meant the world to Holden.

In conclusion, Holden is an unusual teenager. He mentions many objects which define the type of person he is. The first object is the museum. The museum represents innocence since the museum is filled with childhood dreams. The second object is Jane. Jane represents innocence just like the museum since Holden knew Jane when they were younger. The last object is the carousel. It represents coming of age since the carousel was a symbol of childhood and Holden refused to get on.

Works Cited

1. Salinger, J. D. The Catcher in the Rye. Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 1951.