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**TEEN REBELLION IN J. D. SALINGER'S THE CATCHER IN THE RYE****Zayfuna Azatovna Maksetbayeva**

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ABSTRACT. This article examines the theme of teenage rebellion in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, focusing on Holden Caulfield's psychological conflict, his rejection of social conformity, and his search for personal authenticity. Through Holden's alienation and criticism of "phoniness," Salinger portrays rebellion not as defiance for its own sake, but as a sincere struggle to preserve innocence and individuality in a corrupt and conformist society. The study highlights how Holden's emotional turmoil reflects the universal challenges of adolescence and the human desire to remain true to oneself.

Keywords: *J. D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, teenage rebellion, identity, alienation, authenticity, conformity, adolescence*

INTRODUCTION. J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) remains one of the most influential works in twentieth-century American literature, capturing the voice, conflict, and restlessness of postwar youth. Written in a period of growing conformity and social conservatism, the novel introduces Holden Caulfield, a teenager who stands apart from the society he despises. Through his cynical observations and emotional turmoil, Salinger gives expression to the universal experience of adolescence — a stage defined by confusion, sensitivity, and rebellion against adult expectations.

At the core of the novel lies the theme of teenage rebellion, which serves as both a form of protest and a search for authenticity. Holden's defiance emerges not from hatred of the world but from his deep sense of moral disillusionment. He perceives the adult world as "phony," full of hypocrisy and pretense, and this perception fuels his emotional isolation. His rebellion becomes an act of resistance against losing his innocence and individuality, representing a psychological struggle to preserve sincerity in a corrupt environment.

This study aims to explore how Salinger portrays teenage rebellion as a reflection of the social and psychological challenges of growing up. By examining the roots of Holden's alienation, his criticism of social hypocrisy, and his pursuit of moral purity, this paper argues that *The Catcher in the Rye* presents rebellion not as a destructive force, but as a necessary step toward self-awareness and moral awakening. Through Holden's voice, Salinger





exposes the emotional complexity of adolescence and the universal desire to remain true to oneself in a world that demands conformity.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ROOTS OF REBELLION

Holden Caulfield's rebellion in *The Catcher in the Rye* is deeply rooted in his psychological turmoil and emotional instability. His alienation from the world around him stems from an inner conflict between his longing for innocence and his fear of the adult world. Salinger presents Holden as a young man caught between childhood and maturity, unable to find a place where he truly belongs. His impulsive decisions, contradictions, and cynicism are symptoms of a deeper psychological struggle — an attempt to cope with grief, loneliness, and confusion in a world that feels meaningless and cold.

One of the key sources of Holden's rebellion is the trauma of his younger brother Allie's death. This event profoundly shapes his outlook on life, instilling in him both a fear of loss and a resentment toward the inevitability of change. By refusing to accept the passage of time and the corruption of innocence, Holden expresses his rebellion through emotional withdrawal and rejection of social norms. His pain manifests as anger and mockery, but beneath his sarcasm lies deep sorrow and vulnerability. Salinger's portrayal of Holden's mental state reveals rebellion not as deliberate defiance, but as a defense mechanism against emotional suffering.

Holden's alienation also reflects a broader psychological crisis typical of adolescence — the search for self-identity. He questions not only the values of society but also his own purpose and meaning. His rebellion, therefore, is both destructive and introspective: by criticizing the hypocrisy of others, he attempts to define his own authenticity. Yet his inability to reconcile his ideals with reality leaves him trapped in self-doubt. Salinger uses first-person narration to convey this inner tension, allowing readers to experience Holden's conflicting emotions and fragmented thoughts directly, enhancing the realism of his psychological portrait.

Ultimately, the psychological roots of Holden's rebellion lie in his desire to preserve emotional purity in a world he perceives as false and indifferent. His mental conflict symbolizes the universal struggle of adolescence — the attempt to resist conformity while searching for meaning and belonging. Salinger portrays rebellion not as moral corruption, but as a sincere, though painful, effort to remain honest in a deceptive world. Holden's emotional fragility thus becomes both his weakness and his strength, marking his defiance as a profoundly human response to the challenges of growing up.

REBELLION AGAINST SOCIAL CONFORMITY AND 'PHONINESS'

Holden Caulfield's rebellion in *The Catcher in the Rye* is most clearly expressed through his contempt for what he calls "phoniness" — the artificial behavior and insincerity he perceives in the adult world. Throughout the novel, Holden constantly criticizes the people around him for being





hypocritical, materialistic, or shallow. To him, society seems built on pretense and false values, and his rejection of this conformity becomes a form of moral protest. His disgust for social norms reflects not only youthful arrogance but also a desperate need for authenticity in a world dominated by appearances.

Salinger uses Holden's perspective to expose the emptiness of postwar American culture, where success and reputation often take precedence over sincerity and compassion. Holden's rebellion against this environment is therefore symbolic of a broader generational disillusionment. His decision to isolate himself, skip school, and wander aimlessly through New York City mirrors his rejection of the structured, rule-bound society that expects obedience rather than individuality. By refusing to adapt to such expectations, Holden positions himself as both an outsider and a critic of conformity, even though his rebellion brings him loneliness and confusion.

Holden's hatred for "phonies" also reveals his inner contradictions. While he rejects society's hypocrisy, he often behaves in ways that contradict his ideals — lying to people, pretending, and running from uncomfortable truths. This inconsistency emphasizes that his rebellion is not simply ideological but deeply emotional. Salinger presents this conflict as a central aspect of adolescent rebellion: the inability to fully separate from the world one despises. Holden's struggle demonstrates how rebellion can serve as both a form of moral protest and a cry for connection, revealing the paradox of wanting authenticity in a world where everyone, including himself, must play roles to survive.

Holden's rebellion against conformity therefore becomes a search for meaning rather than a rejection of life itself. His criticism of "phoniness" represents a longing for honesty, innocence, and emotional truth. Salinger transforms his defiance into a universal expression of youthful resistance to a society that prioritizes conformity over individuality. In portraying Holden's frustration and sincerity, *The Catcher in the Rye* captures the timeless human desire to remain true to one's principles despite the pressures of a conformist world.

THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR AUTHENTICITY

One of the most significant aspects of Holden Caulfield's rebellion in *The Catcher in the Rye* is his ongoing search for identity. He constantly questions who he is and where he belongs, caught between the innocence of childhood and the expectations of adulthood. This in-between state leaves him uncertain about his values and purpose, pushing him to challenge everything around him. Holden's wandering through New York becomes a metaphor for his inner journey — a restless attempt to find meaning and self-understanding in a world that feels chaotic and false.

Holden's search for authenticity is driven by his fear of becoming what he despises — insincere and emotionally detached. He values genuine emotions and simple human kindness, yet finds it difficult to trust or connect with





others. Every time he encounters hypocrisy, he retreats further into himself, reinforcing his sense of isolation. Salinger uses this tension to reveal the vulnerability behind Holden's rebellion: his anger and sarcasm are not signs of arrogance, but defenses against the fear of losing his true self in a conformist society.

Throughout the novel, Holden idealizes childhood as a time of purity and honesty, contrasting it with the corruption he associates with adulthood. His fantasy of being "the catcher in the rye," saving children from falling into the adult world, illustrates his desire to preserve innocence — both his own and that of others. This image reflects his moral struggle: he wants to live truthfully but cannot reconcile that ideal with the compromises required by real life. His rejection of social roles and expectations becomes both his strength and his downfall, as he fails to find a stable sense of self.

Holden's journey toward self-discovery remains unresolved, which makes it more realistic and emotionally powerful. Salinger presents identity not as something fixed but as a continuous process shaped by doubt, rebellion, and experience. Holden's search for authenticity speaks to the universal human desire to live sincerely in a world full of contradictions. His story captures the essence of adolescence — a period when one must confront illusions, face disillusionment, and still find the courage to seek truth and individuality.

CONCLUSION. Holden Caulfield's story reflects the timeless struggle of adolescence — the need to rebel against a world that feels dishonest and confining. His rejection of "phoniness," his emotional turmoil, and his search for identity all reveal the depth of his inner conflict. Through his perspective, Salinger exposes the pain of growing up, when idealism clashes with the imperfect realities of adult life. Holden's rebellion is not a sign of arrogance or immaturity, but an expression of moral sensitivity in a world that too often rewards conformity over sincerity.

Each aspect of Holden's rebellion — psychological resistance, defiance of social norms, and the search for authenticity — highlights a different dimension of his character. His actions may appear impulsive and irrational, yet they stem from a genuine desire to preserve truth and innocence. By portraying Holden's confusion and honesty, Salinger demonstrates that rebellion can serve as a path toward self-awareness. Rather than offering easy answers, the novel invites readers to reflect on the meaning of individuality and the cost of remaining true to oneself.

Through *The Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger creates more than a portrait of teenage frustration; he captures the universal experience of confronting hypocrisy and loss while striving to stay sincere. Holden's journey continues to resonate with readers because it embodies the essence of human vulnerability — the need to belong without surrendering one's integrity. His





rebellion, though painful and imperfect, becomes a symbol of the enduring human search for truth in a world that often demands compromise.

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