

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -1-

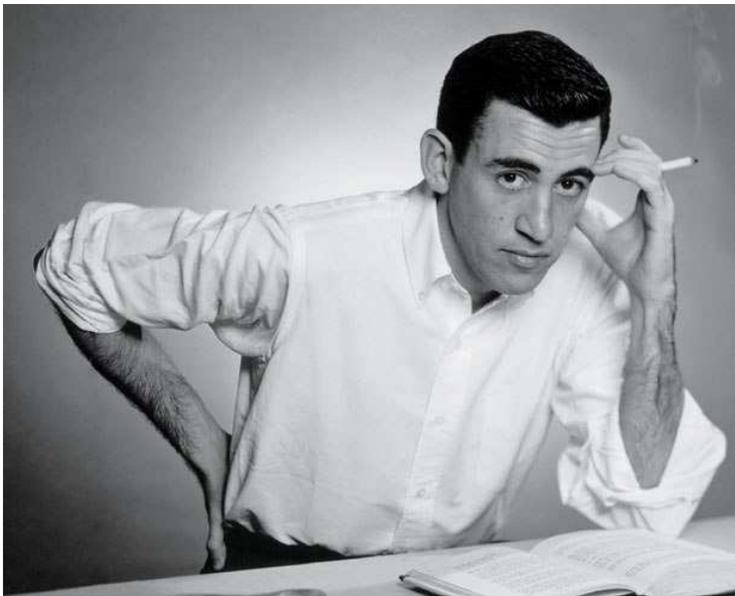
February 2011

Biography

Holden Caulfield's Goddam War

As army sergeant J. D. Salinger hit the beach on D-day, drank with Hemingway in newly liberated Paris, and marched into concentration camps, the hero of *The Catcher in the Rye* was with him. In an adaptation from his Salinger biography, the author reveals how the war changed both Holden Caulfield and his creator.

By Kenneth Slawenski



The author in 1952—a year after *Catcher* was published. *By Anthony Di Gesu/San Diego Historical Society/Hulton Archive Collection/Getty Images.*

In the autumn of 1950, at his home in Westport, Connecticut, J. D. Salinger completed *The Catcher in the Rye*. The achievement was a catharsis. It was confession, purging, prayer, and enlightenment, in a voice so distinct that it would alter American culture.

Holden Caulfield, and the pages that held him, had been the author's constant companion for most of his adult life. Those pages, the first of them written in his mid-20s, just before he shipped off to Europe as an army sergeant, were so precious to Salinger that he carried them on his person throughout the Second World War. Pages of *The Catcher in the Rye* had stormed the beach at Normandy; they had paraded down the streets of Paris, been present at the deaths of countless soldiers in countless places, and been carried through the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. In bits and pieces they had been re-written, put aside, and re-written again, the nature of the story changing as the author himself was changed. Now, in Connecticut, Salinger placed the final line on the final chapter of the book. It is with Salinger's experience of the Second World War in mind that we should understand Holden Caulfield's insight at the Central Park

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -2-

carousel, and the parting words of *The Catcher in the Rye*: “Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody.” All the dead soldiers.

Fighter and Writer

Tuesday, June 6, 1944, was the turning point of J. D. Salinger’s life. It is difficult to overstate the impact of D-day and the 11 months of combat that followed. The war, its horrors and lessons, would brand itself upon every aspect of Salinger’s personality and reverberate through his work. As a young writer before entering the army, Salinger had had stories published in various magazines, including *Collier’s* and *Story*, and he had begun to conjure members of the Caulfield family, including the famous Holden. On D-day he had six unpublished Caulfield stories in his possession, stories that would form the spine of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The experience of war gave his writing a depth and maturity it had lacked; the legacy of that experience is present even in work that is not about war at all. In later life, Salinger frequently mentioned Normandy, but he never spoke of the details—“as if,” his daughter later recalled, “I understood the implications, the unspoken.”

As part of the 4th Counter Intelligence Corps (C.I.C.) detachment, Salinger was to land on Utah Beach with the first wave, at 6:30 A.M., but an eyewitness report has him in fact landing during the second wave, about 10 minutes later. The timing was fortunate. The Channel’s currents had thrown the landing off 2,000 yards to the south, allowing Salinger to avoid the most heavily concentrated German defenses. Within an hour of landing, Salinger was moving inland and heading west, where he and his detachment would eventually connect with the 12th Infantry Regiment.

The 12th had not been so lucky. Although it landed five hours later, it had encountered obstacles that Salinger and his group had not. Just beyond the beach, the Germans had flooded a vast marshland, up to two miles wide, and had concentrated their firepower on the only open causeway. The 12th had been forced to abandon the causeway and wade through waist-high water while under constant threat from enemy guns. It took the 12th Infantry three hours to cross the marsh. After meeting up with the regiment, Salinger would spend the next 26 days in combat. On June 6, the regiment had consisted of 3,080 men. By July 1, the number was down to 1,130.

Unlike many soldiers who had been impatient for the invasion, Salinger was far from naïve about war. In short stories he had already written while in the army, such as “Soft-Boiled Sergeant” and “Last Day of the Last Furlough,” he expressed disgust with the false idealism applied to combat, and attempted to explain that war was a bloody, inglorious affair. But no amount of theoretical insight could have prepared him for what was to come. Salinger would count among his most treasured belongings a small casket containing his five battle stars and the Presidential Unit Citation for valor.

Salinger fought, but he also wrote—wrote constantly, from war’s start to war’s finish. He had begun to write seriously in 1939, as a student at Columbia, under the guidance of a professor, Whit Burnett, who also happened to be the editor of *Story* magazine, and who became for Salinger a mentor and near father figure. By 1941, Salinger was producing stories in rapid succession, each an experiment to find his own writing style. “Slight Rebellion off Madison,”

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -3-

written that year, is the story where Holden Caulfield makes his debut—Salinger described it as “a sad little comedy about a prep school boy on Christmas vacation.” It was spiritually autobiographical, he admitted. Holden is the first character in whom Salinger embedded himself, and their lives would be joined: whatever happened to Salinger would, in a sense, also happen to Holden. Whit Burnett pushed Salinger repeatedly to place Holden Caulfield into a novel, and he kept prodding him even after he was drafted, in 1942.

Burnett had reason to be nervous. Salinger was a short-story writer who was unaccustomed to longer work. To overcome his possible difficulties with length, Salinger chose to construct the novel by writing it in segments—as a series of short stories that might eventually be strung together. By March 1944, he had completed six stories in this manner, most of them somehow featuring Holden Caulfield and other members of the family. There would be nine such stories altogether. Among the Holden stories from this time was one called “I’m Crazy,” which eventually was incorporated wholesale into *The Catcher in the Rye*, becoming the chapters in which Holden visits Mr. Spencer and leaves Pencey Prep.

Salinger wrote much that has not survived—there are tantalizing references in his letters—and he also produced much work that never appeared in print. A week after D-day, he sent a three-sentence postcard to Whit Burnett saying that he was O.K., but also explaining that, under the circumstances, he was “too busy to go on with the book right now.” The truth, however, is that Salinger never stopped writing. Of all the Salinger stories to remain unpublished, perhaps none is finer than “The Magic Foxhole,” the first story he wrote while actually fighting on the front line, and the only work in which he ever depicted active combat. “The Magic Foxhole” is angry, verging on the subversive.

The story opens days after D-day on a slow-moving convoy. It casts the reader as an anonymous hitchhiking G.I. picked up by the narrator, a soldier named Garrity. Addressing the G.I. only as “Mac,” Garrity recounts the events of a battle fought by his battalion right after the invasion. His tale focuses on the company point man, Lewis Gardner, and the experiences that cause him to lose his mind. The most powerful portion of “The Magic Foxhole” is the opening scene, which describes the landings at Normandy. Among the dead bodies on the beach is a solitary living figure—a chaplain crawling around in the sand, frantically searching for his glasses. The narrator, as his transport nears the beach, watches the surreal scene in amazement, until the chaplain, too, is killed. It was no accident that Salinger chose a chaplain to be the only living man among the dead in the heat of war. It was also no accident that the chaplain should be desperate for the clarity his glasses would provide. A man who believed he held the answer to life’s great questions suddenly discovers that he doesn’t—just when he needs an answer most. It is a critical moment in Salinger’s writing. For the first time, he asks the question: Where is God?

A Nightmare World

On August 25, 1944, the Germans surrendered Paris. The 12th Regiment was ordered to flush out resistance from one quadrant of the city. As an intelligence officer, Salinger was also designated to identify Nazi collaborators among the French. According to John Keenan, his C.I.C. partner and best friend throughout the war, they had captured such a collaborator when a nearby crowd caught wind of the arrest and descended on them. After wresting the prisoner away

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -4-

from Salinger and Keenan, who were unwilling to shoot into the throng, the crowd beat the man to death. Salinger and Keenan could do nothing but watch.

Salinger was in Paris for only a few days, but they were the happiest days he would experience during the war. His recollection of them is contained in a letter to Whit Burnett. The high point was a meeting with Ernest Hemingway, who was a war correspondent for *Collier's*. There was no question in Salinger's mind where Hemingway would be found. He jumped into his jeep and made for the Ritz. Hemingway greeted Salinger like an old friend. He claimed to be familiar with his writing, and asked if he had any new stories on him. Salinger managed to locate a copy of *The Saturday Evening Post* containing "Last Day of the Last Furlough," which had been published that summer. Hemingway read it and was impressed. The two men talked shop over drinks.

Salinger was relieved to find that Hemingway was not at all pretentious or overly macho, as he had feared he might be. Rather, he found him to be gentle and well grounded: overall, a "really good guy." Salinger tended to separate Hemingway's professional persona from his personal one. He told one friend that Hemingway was essentially kind by nature but had been posturing for so many years that it now came naturally to him. Salinger disagreed with the underlying philosophy of Hemingway's work. He said that he hated Hemingway's "overestimation of sheer physical courage, commonly called 'guts,' as a virtue. Probably because I'm short on it myself."

As time went on, Salinger derived great personal strength from his relationship with Hemingway, and knew him by his nickname, "Papa." The warmth did not necessarily transfer to Hemingway's writing—at least not if one goes by Holden Caulfield's later condemnation of *A Farewell to Arms*. But during the war, Salinger was grateful for Hemingway's friendship.



The Allied invasion of Normandy, June 6, 1944. J. D. Salinger was part of the second wave attacking Utah Beach. *By Robert F. Sargent/Bettmann/Corbis; digital colorization by Lorna Clark.*

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -5-

After the liberation of Paris, General Dwight D. Eisenhower's chief of staff declared that "militarily, the war is over." Salinger's division would have the honor of being the first to enter Germany. Once it had crossed into the Third Reich and breached the Siegfried line, its orders were to sweep away any resistance from the area of the Hürtgen Forest and take up a position to protect the flank of the First Army.

When Salinger entered Hürtgen, he crossed into a nightmare world. The forest was more heavily fortified than anyone had guessed. The Germans employed tree bursts, which exploded well above the soldiers' heads, resulting in a shower of shrapnel and shredded tree limbs. Then there was the weather—either drenching wet or burning cold. Nearly half of the 2,517 casualties suffered by the 12th Infantry in Hürtgen were due to the elements. Hürtgen is viewed by historians as among the greatest Allied debacles of the war.

Salinger did manage to find one moment of solace. During the battle for the forest, Hemingway was briefly stationed as a correspondent with the 22nd Regiment, just a mile from Salinger's encampment. One night, during a lull in the fighting, Salinger turned to a fellow soldier, Werner Kleeman, a translator he had befriended while training in England. "Let's go," Salinger urged. "Let's go see Hemingway." The two men made their way through the forest to Hemingway's quarters, a small cabin lit by the extraordinary luxury of its own generator. The visit lasted two or three hours. They drank celebratory champagne from aluminum canteen cups.

Salinger's choice of companion was perhaps an expression of gratitude. Among his commanders in the Hürtgen Forest was an officer whom Kleeman later described as having been "a heavy drinker" and cruel to his troops. The officer had once ordered Salinger to remain in a frozen foxhole overnight, despite knowing that he was without proper supplies. Kleeman secretly delivered two items from Salinger's belongings that helped him survive: a blanket and a pair of his mother's ubiquitous woolen socks.

Hürtgen changed everyone who experienced it. Most survivors never spoke of Hürtgen again. The sufferings that Salinger endured are essential to understanding his later work. They gave rise, for instance, to the nightmares suffered by Sergeant X in "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor."

Ghostly Encounter

From Hürtgen, Salinger sent a letter to his friend Elizabeth Murray, saying that he had been writing as much as possible. He claimed to have completed five stories since January and to be in the process of finishing another three. Years later, Salinger's counter-intelligence colleagues would remember him as constantly stealing away to write. One recalled a time when the unit came under heavy fire. Everyone began ducking for cover. Glancing over, the soldiers caught sight of Salinger typing away under a table.

The pain of loss dominates Salinger's seventh Caulfield story, "This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise," which was probably written around this very time. As the story opens, Sergeant Vincent Caulfield is at boot camp in Georgia, sitting aboard a truck along with 33 other G.I.'s. It is late evening, and despite a downpour the men are bound for a dance in town. But there is a

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -6-

problem. Only 30 men are allowed to go to the dance, and the group aboard the truck therefore contains 4 too many. The truck is delayed while the men wait for a lieutenant to arrive and resolve the issue. As they wait, the conversation among the men reveals that Vincent Caulfield is in charge of the group and therefore responsible for deciding whom to exclude. In a stream-of-consciousness exploration of loneliness and nostalgia, the narrative concentrates less on what is happening in the truck than on what is going on in Vincent's mind: Vincent's younger brother Holden has been reported missing in action in the Pacific, and is presumed dead.

While the men on the truck talk about home, where they come from, and what they did before the war, Vincent experiences a series of flashbacks. He sees himself at the 1939 World's Fair with his sister Phoebe as they visit the Bell Telephone exhibition. When they come out, they find Holden standing there. Holden asks Phoebe for her autograph, and Phoebe playfully punches him in the stomach, "happy to see him, happy he was her brother." Vincent's mind keeps leaping back to Holden. He sees him at prep school, on the tennis court, and sitting on the porch at Cape Cod. How can Holden possibly be missing?

When the lieutenant arrives, he is visibly annoyed. When he asks about the situation, Vincent feigns ignorance and pretends to count heads. He offers a movie to anyone willing to forgo the dance. Two soldiers skulk off into the night, but Vincent still has two men too many. Finally he makes a decision and orders the last two men on the left to leave the truck. One soldier dismounts and slips away. Vincent waits and finally sees another soldier emerge. As the figure comes into the light, the image of a young boy is revealed. All eyes are fixed upon him as he stands in the downpour. "I was on the list," the boy says, almost in tears. Vincent does not respond. In the end it is the lieutenant who orders the boy back into the truck and arranges for an extra girl at the party to match the extra man.

The boy's appearance is the climax of the story. A figure emerging from the darkness, he is vulnerable and distressed. He is the spirit of Holden. Vincent reaches out and turns up the boy's collar to protect him from the rain. As the story concludes, Vincent pleads to his missing brother: "Just go up to somebody—and tell them you're Here—not Missing, not dead, not anything but Here."

Battle Fatigue

His intelligence duties brought Salinger face-to-face with the Holocaust. The Counter Intelligence Corps had compiled and disseminated a confidential report to its agents titled "The German Concentration Camps." C.I.C. officers were instructed that upon entering an area suspected of containing one of these camps it was their duty to make straightaway for its location.

On April 22, after a difficult fight for the town of Rothenberg, the path of Salinger's division brought it into a triangular region approximately 20 miles on each side, situated between the Bavarian cities of Augsburg, Landsberg, and Dachau. This territory held the vast Dachau concentration-camp system. As the 12th Regiment swarmed into the area, it came upon the camps. "You could live a lifetime," he once told his daughter, "and never really get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose."

Continued (page 3 of 3)

Salinger's wartime experiences eventually brought on a deep depression. When the German Army surrendered, on May 8, 1945, the world erupted in celebration. Salinger spent the day alone, sitting on his bed, staring at a .45-caliber pistol clutched in his hands. What would it feel like, he wondered, if he were to fire the gun through his left palm? Salinger recognized the potential danger of his state of mind. In July, he checked himself into a hospital in Nuremberg for treatment.

Most of what we know about Salinger's hospitalization is derived from a July 27 letter he wrote to Hemingway from the hospital. It began by openly confessing that Salinger had been "in an almost constant state of despondency" and wanted to talk to someone professional before it got out of hand. During his stay, the staff had peppered him with questions: What was his childhood like? How was his sex life? Did he like the army? Salinger had given a sarcastic answer to each question—except for the one about the army. That last question he had answered with an unambiguous "yes." He very much had the future Holden Caulfield novel in mind when he gave this answer, explaining to Hemingway that he was afraid of the impact a psychological discharge might have on how the book's author would be perceived.

Some of the irony and vernacular of Holden Caulfield comes through in this letter. "There are very few arrests left to be made in our section," he writes. "We're now picking up children under ten if their attitudes are snotty." Also apparent is Salinger's need for affirmation. At times, his tone is pleading. Will Hemingway please write to him? Can Hemingway possibly find the time to visit him later, in New York? Is there anything Salinger can do for him? "The talks I had with you here," he told Hemingway, "were the only hopeful minutes of the whole business."

When Salinger returned home from the war, he resumed his life as a writer of short stories, many of which appeared in *The New Yorker*. But he never lost sight of Holden Caulfield. What Salinger had of the novel was a tangle of stories written as far back as 1941. The challenge was to weave the strands together into a unified work of art. He took up the task early in 1949.

The war changed Holden. He had first appeared in the pre-war story "Slight Rebellion off Madison," which would be absorbed into *Catcher*. But the passage of time and events completely transformed the episode—Salinger's own experiences melted into the retelling. In "Slight Rebellion," Holden is pointedly selfish and confused; he is presented in a third-person voice, far removed from the reader. The same scene in *The Catcher in the Rye* conveys an impression of nobility. Holden's words are largely the same, but in the novel his selfishness has evaporated and he seems to be speaking a larger truth. The third-person voice is gone—the reader has direct access to Holden's thoughts and words.

When Salinger finished *The Catcher in the Rye*, he sent the manuscript to Robert Giroux, at Harcourt, Brace. When Giroux received the manuscript, he "thought it a remarkable book and considered [himself] lucky to be its editor." He was convinced that the novel would do well but later confessed that "the thought of a best-seller never crossed my mind." Assured of the novel's distinction and having already sealed the deal with a handshake, Giroux sent *The Catcher in the Rye* to Harcourt, Brace vice president Eugene Reynal. After Reynal reviewed the manuscript, it

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -8-

became clear to Giroux that the publishing house would not recognize the oral contract. Worse still, it was apparent that Reynal did not understand the novel at all. As Giroux later recalled, “I didn’t realize what big trouble I was in until, after he’d read it, he said, ‘Is Holden Caulfield supposed to be crazy?’ He also told me he’d given the typescript to one of our textbook editors to read. I said ‘Textbook, what has that to do with it?’ ‘It’s about a preppie, isn’t it?’ The textbook editor’s report was negative, and that settled that.”

“Those bastards,” Salinger said after getting the news. The manuscript was sent to Little, Brown, in Boston, which snatched it up immediately.

Salinger would endure one further blow. At the end of 1950, his agent delivered *The Catcher in the Rye* to the offices of *The New Yorker*, a gift from Salinger to the magazine that had stood by him for so long. He intended for *The New Yorker* to publish excerpts from the book. *The New Yorker*’s reaction was conveyed by Gus Lobrano, the fiction editor with whom he had worked closely for many years. According to Lobrano, the *Catcher* manuscript had been reviewed by himself and at least one other editor. Neither of them liked it. Its characters were considered to be unbelievable and the Caulfield children, in particular, too precocious. In their opinion, “The notion that in one family there are four such extraordinary children ... is not quite tenable.” *The New Yorker* declined to print a single word of the book.

The Catcher in the Rye was published on July 16, 1951. The public impact was greater than Salinger could have hoped for—or perhaps could deal with. *Time* magazine praised the novel’s depth and compared the author to Ring Lardner. *The New York Times* called *Catcher* “unusually brilliant.” Despite its initial reservations, *The New Yorker* found it “brilliant, funny,” and “meaningful.” The less favorable reviews generally found fault with the novel’s language and idiom. (A number of critics were offended by Holden’s repeated use of “goddam” and especially the phrase “fuck you”—shocking for any novel in 1951.) *Catcher* soon emerged onto the *New York Times* best-seller list and would remain there for seven months.

What readers encountered within the covers of *The Catcher in the Rye* was often life-changing. From the novel’s opening line, Salinger draws the reader into the peculiar, unrestrained reality of Holden Caulfield, whose meandering thoughts, emotions, and memories populate the most completely stream-of-consciousness experience yet offered by American literature.

For Salinger himself, writing *The Catcher in the Rye* was an act of liberation. The bruising of Salinger’s faith by the terrible events of war is reflected in Holden’s loss of faith, caused by the death of his brother Allie. The memory of fallen friends haunted Salinger for years, just as Holden was haunted by the ghost of his brother. The struggle of Holden Caulfield echoes the spiritual journey of the author. In both author and character, the tragedy is the same: a shattered innocence. Holden’s reaction is shown through his scorn of adult phoniness and compromise. Salinger’s reaction was personal despondency, through which his eyes were opened to the darker forces of human nature.

Both eventually came to terms with the burdens they carried, and their epiphanies were the same. Holden comes to realize he can enter adulthood without becoming false and sacrificing his values; Salinger came to accept that knowledge of evil did not ensure damnation. The experience

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -9-

of war gave a voice to Salinger, and therefore to Holden Caulfield. He is no longer speaking only for himself—he is reaching out to all of us.

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -10-

Bunch Of Phonies Mourn J.D. Salinger

The Onion

[NEWS](#) January 28, 2010

[Vol 46 Issue 04](#)



Salinger

CORNISH, NH—In this big dramatic production that didn't do anyone any good (and was pretty embarrassing, really, if you think about it), thousands upon thousands of phonies across the country mourned the death of author J.D. Salinger, who was 91 years old for crying out loud. "He had a real impact on the literary world and on millions of readers," said hot-shot English professor David Clarke, who is just like the rest of them, and even works at one of those crummy schools that rich people send their kids to so they don't have to look at them for four years. "There will never be another voice like his." Which is exactly the lousy kind of goddamn thing that people say, because really it could mean lots of things, or nothing at all even, and it's just a perfect example of why you should never tell anybody anything

Search For Self Called Off After 38 Years

The Onion

[NEWS](#) September 14, 2005

[Vol 41 Issue 37](#) · [Human Interest](#) · [Mental Health](#) · [Self-Improvement](#) · [People](#)

CHICAGO—The longtime search for self conducted by area man Andrew Speth was called off this week, the 38-year-old said Monday.



Speth sets out on a new life, moments after announcing the end of his search.

"I always thought that if I kept searching and exploring, I'd discover who I truly was," said Speth from his Wrigleyville efficiency. "Well, I looked deep into the innermost recesses of my soul, I plumbed the depths of my subconscious, and you know what I found? An empty, windowless room the size of an aircraft hangar. From now on, if anybody needs me, I'll be sprawled out on this couch drinking black-cherry soda and watching *Law & Order* like everybody else."

"F**k it," he added.

Speth said he began his search for himself in the late '70s, when in junior high he "realized that there was more to life than what [he] could see from [his] parents' Dundee, IL home."

The search initially showed great promise, with Speth's early discovery of his uncle's old Doors records and a copy of *The Catcher In The Rye*. Over the next two decades, however, the "leads just petered out." Although Speth searched in a wide variety of places—including the *I Ching*, a tantric-sex manual, and a course in chakrology—he uncovered nothing.

"My family and friends kept telling me to give up," Speth said. "But I couldn't believe that my true self was forever lost."

Speth was dogged in his pursuit, sacrificing his higher education, bank account, social status, and personal esteem. Despite the rising costs and mounting adversity, he vowed he would never give up his search—until now.

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -12-

"I can't believe how many creative-writing courses I've taken, how many expensive sessions with every conceivable type of therapist," Speth said. "All that time—a whole life—wasted on a wild-goose chase."

[pagebreak]

Since calling off the search, Speth has canceled his yoga classes, turned in his organic co-op membership card, and withdrawn plans to go on a sweat-lodge retreat in Saskatchewan. On Tuesday afternoon, he loaded books by such diverse authors as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Meister Eckhart, and George Gurdjieff into a box labeled "free shit," and left it outside of his apartment beside a trash can.



Speth tours Prague in 1991 at the height of his search.

"The only books I'll be reading from now on are ones that happen to catch my eye in the supermarket checkout line on the few occasions I leave my apartment to buy more Fig Newtons," Speth said.

Speth said he will no longer lament his coding job at Eagle Client Services, but will rather "embrace the fact that I have a job that makes enough money to pay for cable." Additionally, Speth has vowed to marry "the first woman who will have me, whether I love her or not."

"Oh, and if I never throw another goddamn clay pot in my life, it'll be too soon," he added.

Though hardened and haggard from his long search, Speth expressed relief that it was over. Asked if he had any advice for those who are continuing on their own searches, Speth had two words of advice: "Give up."

"Trust me—there's nothing out there for you to find," Speth said. "You're wasting your life. The sooner you realize you have no self to discover, the sooner you can get on with what's truly important: celebrity magazines, snack foods, and Internet porn."

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -13-

HOLDEN'S TAXONOMY PROJECT

Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus...but where is Holden coming from?

Holden Caulfield is not your most trustworthy narrator. To be sure, he could be America's most (in)famous unreliable narrator. From the beginning of the novel this self-confessed liar and mental patient demonstrates dubious credibility. How then are we to mine the character of this most complex protagonist? In Holden Caulfield, author J.D. Salinger unfolds a character defined by the people in his world, or, more specifically, by the way he approaches the people in his world.

Your job—along with your group—is to categorize the people in Holden's world, examine the nature of his responses to them, and to analyze what these responses reveal about Holden himself. What is the nature of his internal conflict? What themes are revealed in the novel?

For this project, the class will divide into six different groups. Each group will be assigned a particular group based on both age and gender. You will organize your findings in the following structure:

- **Thesis:** What is Holden's attitude toward this specific gender and age group? This should be a specific argument that will be substantiated by your analysis of evidence. Give us the "what" and "why" here, while your evidence and analysis in the next section will provide the "how".
 - **Above the thesis, you will want to include a Universal Thematic Claim (UNT).** I will go over the specifics of this in class.
- **Evidence & Analysis:** Which characters belong in your particular age and gender group and why? Present sufficient evidence for each character that supports your argument and explain how these scenes/quotes substantiate your opinion. Be prepared to direct the class to the particular chapter and page number to reference the evidence you will be providing.
- **Conclusion:** Now reinvent your thesis by answering this question: "So what?" What greater meaning is there to the work your group has just presented? What universal truths or relevant meanings are revealed through this dimension of Holden's conception of the world and self? How does Holden's experience or attitude discussed here resonate with or speak to *our* experiences, *our* reality?

Presentation Requirements:

- You will use some sort of presentation software (like PowerPoint or Prezi) to show your findings. You may divide up the pages as you see fit, and you should include visuals to enhance and support your presentation.
- Use bullet point notes in your presentation. Do not cram your slides with an overwhelming amount of text; avoid paragraphs. Include only key points that you as the presenter will speak to and elaborate on. Presentation should be user-friendly. (you may use index cards or your phone to support your presentation). **DO NOT READ** the slide
- Length: All presentations must be a minimum of 5 minutes, and a maximum of 6. I will allow you a grace period of 7 minutes
- All group members must speak.
- You have _____ to work on the project with your group.
- Use your *Catcher in the Rye* homework packet and this reading packet to assist you in your efforts.
- See the Group Presentation in your syllabus for requirements.

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -14-

Groups for Holden's Taxonomy Project
Holden's Place in a Man's World

Characters	Age Group	Holden's Attitude Toward Each Group
Mr. Spencer D.B. Holden's father Carl Luce James Castle Allie	Older	
Stradlater Mr. Antolini Maurice Ackley Singing kid	Same Age	
	Younger	

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -15-

Groups for Holden's Taxonomy Project
Holden's Relationships with Women

Characters	Age Group	Holden's Attitude Toward Group
Sunny Sally Hayes Faith Cavendish Holden's mom Ernie Morrow's Mom	Older	
Phobe The three nuns Jane Gallagher The three girls in the bar	Same Age	
	Younger	

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -16-

Holden vs. Adulthood Project

"The boy himself is at once was too simple and too complex for us to make any final comment about him or his story. Perhaps the safest thing we can say about Holden is that he was born in the world not just strongly attracted to beauty but, almost, hopelessly impaled on it."

— Original jacket copy of *Catcher in the Rye*

DIRECTIONS: In J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield identifies adulthood with hypocrisy, loneliness, and alienation—three **motifs** that appear throughout the novel. Examine each of the **symbols** from the list below and explain how it reveals insights into how the motifs of hypocrisy, loneliness, or alienation are treated in Salinger's work. You are encouraged (though not required) to interpret these symbols for the universal or mythic allusions they bear, since Salinger surely had those archetypal meanings in mind when crafting this novel. Are there allusions to characters or stories from the Bible or Greek mythology in your symbol? Are there timeless, enduring connotations associated with a particular color Salinger uses? Do you recognize a popular character archetype (e.g., outcast, self-anointed hero, martyr, mentor, femme fatale) in a particular individual from the novel?

SYMBOLS

Red Hunting Hat	Color of Allie's hair
Museum of Natural History	The Nuns
Little Shirley Beans	James Castle
Ducks in the Central Park Lagoon	Allie's Baseball Glove
Radio City Music Hall	Jane Gallagher
Phoebe	The Mummies
The Carousel	Mr. Antolini

DUE:

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -17-

Holden's Psychological Traits

DIRECTIONS: Below is a list of potential psychological traits that Holden Caulfield could be accused of having. As you go through the chart, provide a statement that articulates how Holden displays each of these traits, then provide a direct quote or paraphrase of a scene in which each trait is evidenced in the text.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAITS	AGREE (OPINION)	CITED PASSAGE (FACT OR SUPPORT)
Exaggeration		
Depression		
Isolation/Alienation		
Violent Outbursts		
Lying		
Nervousness		
Fantasy World		
Emotionally Unstable		
Immature Relationships w/ Women		

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -18-

“Comin’ Thro’ The Rye” – Tracing the Title: PART 1

Robert Burns Original (Poem)

Chorus.

O Jenny's a' weet, poor body,
Jenny's seldom dry:
She draigl't a' her petticoatie,
Comin thro' the rye!

1.

Comin thro' the rye, poor body,
Comin thro' the rye,
She draigl't a' her petticoatie,
Comin thro' the rye!

2.

Gin a body meet a body
Comin thro' the rye,
Gin a body kiss a body,
Need a body cry?

3.

Gin a body meet a body
Comin thro' the glen,
Gin a body kiss a body,
Need the warld ken?

4.

Gin a body meet a body
Comin thro' the grain,
Gin a body kiss a body,
The thing's a body's ain.

Standard English Translation (Song)

Chorus.

O, Jenny is all wet, poor body,
Jenny is seldom dry:
She dragged all her petticoats,
Coming through the rye!

Coming through the rye, poor body,
Coming through the rye,
She draggled all her petticoats,
Coming through the rye!

Should a body meet a body
Coming through the rye,
Should a body kiss a body,
Need a body cry?

Should a body meet a body
Coming through the glen,
Should a body kiss a body,
Need the world know?

Should a body meet a body
Coming through the grain,
Should a body kiss a body,
The thing is a body's own.

1. What situation is Burns describing in his poem?

2. In what ways has reading the Burns' poem helped you to better understand the title of Salinger's novel?

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -19-

“Comin’ Thro’ The Rye” – Tracing the Title: PART 2

DIRECTIONS: Using the text passages to which you have been directed, complete this chart which helps trace the way Salinger indicates to his readers the meaning of the title. Using this information, answer the questions that follow.

PASSAGE	HOLDEN’S LOCATION	WHO HE ENCOUNTERS NEXT AND WHAT HAPPENS
Allie’s baseball glove (pp. 38-39)		
The singing kid (pp. 114-115)		
Holden & Phoebe (pp. 172-173)		
Phoebe on the carrousel (pp. 211-213)		

1. How does the movement in location indicate Holden’s mental evolution?

2. How do Holden’s disappointments indicate his growth as an individual? Consider the age and gender of each person.

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -20-

POTENTIAL UNIT 1 ESSAY PROMPTS

Two of the following six writing tasks will appear on your Unit 1 exam for *Catcher in the Rye*. You will be asked to respond to one of the following prompts in a well-organized and thoroughly supported 4-paragraph essay on a separate sheet of notebook paper. Be sure to indicate which writing task you are responding to on your essay.

WRITING TASK 1

Holden Caulfield refuses to conform to the expectations of society. Is this non-conformity a good thing or a bad thing, either for the individual nonconformist or for the larger social body to which he belongs? Explain, using specific events and characters from the book.

WRITING TASK 2

Mr. Spencer gave Holden the advice that “Life *is* a game that one plays according to the rules” (8), and Mr. Antolini warned him that he was headed for “a special kind of fall, a horrible kind...designed for men who, at some time or other in their lives, were looking for something their own environment couldn’t supply them with....So they gave up looking....I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one way or another, for some highly unworthy cause” (188).

Considering what Holden learns, how do you think Holden would respond to their advice if he returned to see them? Include a thorough discussion of Holden’s beliefs and values in your essay.

WRITING TASK 3

Both Jane and Phoebe are special to Holden. What is the basis for their importance to Holden? Deal with the contrast you see between the real world person and the image in Holden’s mind.

NAME _____

UNIT 1: *Catcher in the Rye*
Reading Packet -21-

WRITING TASK 4

According to adolescent psychologists, the primary life task of the teenage years is individuation, the development of an individual sense of identity. Is Holden's "individuation" primarily a matter of the individual character's internal makeup or of the environment surrounding him? Support your opinion with evidence from the text.

WRITING TASK 5

In his review of *Catcher in the Rye*, Mark Phillips comments:

On the surface, the book is a simplistic tale of a boy's unhappiness over a biological fact: that teenagers must grow to adulthood just as surely as babies must be pulled screaming and kicking from their mothers' wombs. Yet in asking readers if innocence *must* be lost when a child grows up, Salinger makes his contribution to a persistently and profoundly American literary theme.

Must Holden lose his innocence to grow up? In the process of growing up, what aspects of innocence does he lose, and what aspects of innocence does he maintain? Support your answer with specific references to the text.

WRITING TASK 6

Holden narrates his story about the few days between the end of the fall school term and Christmas from a mental hospital to an anonymous audience shortly after becoming "sick." Clearly, his story describes a short but critical time period in his young life—but what impact have these crucial hours had on Holden as a troubled, confused teenager? What effects have his aimless wanderings through New York City had on him? Evaluate the degree to which Holden changes (if any) from the beginning to the end of his narrative, using evidence from the text to support your opinion. Be sure to consider the thematic significance for the presence or absence of this change in your response.