

Dear J.D. Salinger,

How were you able to capture the person I am now in *Catcher in the Rye*? I am a teenage boy, coping with every facet of the adolescent man's heart: bitter wrath, self-assured trickery, and tearing sadness. You touched my heart, Salinger, with Holden, a boy full of so many lies, fears, and apprehensions. As unflattering as it may be to myself, I find a Holden in me, a regretful teenager lost on a pathway towards adulthood. My experiences took years and my lesson may not have been learned so harshly, but Salinger, you illustrate so well the inner struggles of every teenage boy in your tale of self-revelation and maturity. No book has connected with my heart and mind in such a way before, and I can confidently say none ever will.

Holden, not unlike myself, attended a high school and, unlike myself, did poorly enough to leave the school. But Holden and I at least hold one thing in common: the tendency to stir up strife and inevitably be hurt by our own actions. Perhaps I've not reached the simple level of maturity that calls for such self-control, but I'd just as soon take a whack at a friend if they irritated me, let alone went out with a girl I'd been friends with for so long. Maybe it's our testosterone speaking in the only way it can, naturally through our fists.

Of course, I fancy myself a brilliant liar and would just as soon take the ignominy of lying upon myself if it saved my grades. Sure, cheating on tests might be an extremity I've yet to achieve, but not just once or twice but many times, perhaps by now countless times, over my adolescence have I lied to keep the grade, the girl or, ironically, someone's trust.

And what would be a gloomy adolescent without the consistent pressure that comes with the realization that our days as boys enjoying ourselves are numbered. Four years to experience what I can with the rest of my boyhood, and I spend it thinking about what it would be like to have all the privileges of an adult, such a bitter irony. Just like Holden looking out the window on the world from his hotel room, I see only what it appears like and never have the courage to claim it for myself.

It is my thesis that Holden's imperfections make him the perfect model of my years as a teenager. Like Holden, I can see only the surface of maturity. And like Holden, I must someday have my adulthood come to fruition. But the most frightening part of the inevitable is that I must make this journey on my own. There will be no Holden in New York to guide my footsteps and there will be no clue to when it will happen. And, hopefully, I will be able to stand under a grey, overcast sky and pass my own hat from my hands. And then I'll be able to see the Holden you crafted complete in me.

Sincerely,

*Neale Johnson*