

## A Mortal Superman

What is a hero? There are numerous definitions of a hero yet only one definition for each person. For J.D. Salinger, author of The Catcher In the Rye, his view of a hero is someone like Holden Caulfield. Holden is a hero with ideal characteristics but is not perfect. Thereby, Holden is someone to admire but retains his humanity and allows the readers to believe they can be like him. Holden has attributes that are excellent in his spirit but he acts differently so people in general can relate and learn from his actions.

As the hero, he is to emit good thoughts and actions. We learn many of his good attributes early in the novel. For example, he is sentimental about places and people. He says, "I don't care if it's a sad good-by...I like to know I'm leaving it. If you don't, you feel even worse," (p.4) when he is getting ready to leave his school, Pencey Prep for his home in New York. Although he had a horrible time there, he wants closure from that place. In addition, he says, "Ballet and all. She [Jane Gallagher] used to practice about two hours every day...I used to play checkers with her all the time." (p.31) Then, he continues to reminisce about her for a while longer and later in the book. Another example of him being a hero is his thoughtfulness and politeness. One situation where he is thoughtful is when he writes, "Dear Mr. Spencer...Respectfully yours, Holden Caulfield." (p.13) Mr. Spencer is Holden's history teacher, and he is sick and elderly. Holden writes that note to tell Mr. Spencer to flunk him and he should not feel any remorse because it is the right action. He is polite because he cares about the condition of Mr. Spencer despite his expulsion from school. Holden shakes Mr. Spencer's hand and says, "I'll drop you a line, sir. Take care of your grippe, now." (p.15) Although, Holden is sad from his conversation and predicament, he respects his teacher and leaves as a

friend. Yet another example is that Holden is truthful and moral. We perceive him to be truthful because he speaks about anything on his mind and without hesitation. Such an action is when he says, "All he meant was you'd look better and feel better if you sort of brushed your teeth once in a while," to Robert Ackley, his neighbor. Finally, he is moral because he does not participate in lewd activities and defends other people's honor. He proves that when he almost strikes Stradlater because Stradlater was befouling Jane's reputation. Also, he did not want to complete the agreement with Sunny but said, "Don't you feel like talking for a while?" (p.95)

Unlike other novels where the hero is perfect, this novel has a flawed character to portray human mentality realistically. A flaw that Holden has is swearing. He swears verbally and mentally. He says, "...and all that David Copperfield kind of crap..." (p.1) "It cost him damn near four thousand bucks," (p.1) "Game, my ass," (p.8) and other swear words that he repeatedly uses throughout the book. A further flaw is his smoking. He says, "I have no wind, if you want to know the truth. I'm quite a heavy smoker, for one thing—that is, I used to be," (p.5) but he is lying about that because he continues to smoke. This leads into another of his flaws, lying. In the novel, he admits that he is a great liar and he lies many times. He lies about his age, name, feelings when he is trying to be sympathetic, and about his status as he lived alone after Pencey for a bit. Finally, he is lazy in his schoolwork. He has five classes and he is flunking four of them because he does not do the assignments. Also, he is not flunking a subject because he knows the material already from another time luckily.

As the flawed hero, Holden gives a filtered view for the reader because he gives his own opinion about events. Yet, the view he sees should be the view the reader sees if

the reader is ideally good like Holden. Then, if the reader is not an ideal person, there is the urge to try to become an ideal person to understand life as Holden does although Holden is a flawed hero.