

Holden values essay  
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### What Holden Believes In

The novel Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger is a book about a 17-year-old boy who does not want to grow up and take on the responsibilities of adulthood. Before the novel begins, he has already flunked out of two prep schools. After he leaves yet another prep school he has flunked out of, he travels to New York City before going home to face his parents. In his journey, the reader gets to know Holden and tries to understand him. It is clear that he has likes and dislikes, wants and desires. He also has principles or values that become evident as the story unfolds. Holden's three most important values are intelligence, genuineness, and politeness.

From the very beginning of the novel and throughout, Holden shows that he values intelligence. He admires people, young and old, for what they know or how smart they are. One of the young people that he admires for her intelligence is his 10-year-old sister, Phoebe. Because she knows what she likes, Holden values her and her intellect. At one point, Holden explains how bright she is. Holden says of her, "I mean, if you tell old Phoebe something, she knows exactly what the hell you're talking about. If you take her to a lousy movie, she knows it's a lousy movie. If you take her to a pretty good movie, she knows it's a pretty good movie."(67) Another way that the reader sees that Holden values intelligence is that he has trouble really liking a girl or wanting to be with her if she is not smart. While on a date with Sally Hayes, Holden comes up with an elaborate plan to leave, drop out of society and run away to a cabin in the woods. Sally will have nothing to do with the idea and won't really even listen to Holden. After giving up on her, he says, "You could see there

wasn't any sense in trying to have an intelligent conversation. I was sorry as hell I started it."(133) Holden wants to be able to respect people, and if they are intelligent, he does respect them because they are like him.

Holden believes it's important to be real, to be genuine. He values the people in his life that are honest and real and dismisses those that are "phony." Though he struggles with who he is, he knows that purity is better than glitz. He derides his brother for selling out and 'going Hollywood' with his writing instead of continuing to write stories for children. Holden says of D.B., "He used to be a regular writer, when he was home. Now he's out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute."(1) In the girls he likes, he also admires this genuineness though he finds it in only one girl, Jane Gallagher. He admires Jane for being open with him. He feels like she is one girl that he knows well. He knows that she leaves her checkers in the back row and he knows her family, too. Holden tells the reader, "I knew her like a book. I really did."(76) Knowing someone, really knowing them, means that both people have to be honest and genuine with each other, and this is what he values in his closest relationships.

Politeness or courtesy is very important to Holden, too. Whether he is honest or not, he is always polite. When Holden first leaves Pency Prep, he finds himself on a train bound for New York with a mom of one of his classmates, a classmate he and others don't care for. Holden pretends, however, that her son, Ernie, is a great guy and that everyone on campus likes the boy when that is actually far from the truth. He does it out of politeness to the mom. Holden thinks, "But I'll bet, after all the crap I shot, Mrs. Morrow'll keep thinking of him now as this very shy, modest guy that wouldn't let us nominate him for president." (57) Later, as he goes back to Grand Central Station after he leaves the hotel, he shows

again that he is courteous and polite by helping out three nuns he meets there at the sandwich bar. He says, "They didn't seem to know what the hell to do with their suitcases, so I gave them a hand." (108) The courtesy that he extends to others doesn't always come back to him, but that doesn't stop him from being polite himself.

Consequently, Holden shows his values throughout the novel even though he often seems unsure of himself. He values intelligence, genuineness, and politeness in others and in himself. Although Holden is a misguided young adult, he manages to get help at the end of the book, which leaves the reader to hope for a future for Holden that will be much better than the situations he is in throughout most of the book. Holden stands out in American Literature as a teen who is trying very hard to figure out the world of adulthood and to cope with his changing world while hanging on to his own beliefs.