

**The Catcher in the Rye**  
**Theme Essay**

The theme of a piece of literature is the underlying message. In literature, there are many themes that reoccur. J.D. Salinger's novel, The Catcher in the Rye, contains several recurring thematic topics:

- Alienation (being separated from others)
- Real vs. Superficial (phony)—focus not only on when Holden thinks someone else is a phony but also when he, too, does something “phony”.
- Hypocrisy
- Fear of losing one's innocence (childhood)
- Loss of trust in adults
- Dealing with Failure & Pressure
- Anger
- Connection with Family
- Loss and grief
- Fear of success
- Wanting time to stop or be reversed

They are thematic topics. In this essay, you need to decide what message you believe Salinger is conveying to the reader about the thematic topic. As you sift through your quotes on the thematic topic, what is the “nugget” of gold? What is their central message? What are they really trying to say? If Salinger were here and you could ask him what the message he was trying to show us about your chosen topic through Holden's experiences, what do you think he would say? Answering these will help you narrow down your theme.

**Directions:** You will write a thesis statement indicating the theme from The Catcher in the Rye you will discuss in your paper. Use quotes from the novel to prove your thesis—you'll get these from your theme journal. Congratulations to those of you who've kept a well-written theme/quote journal!!! This will be easy for you!!!

**Bad example:** The theme of hypocrisy is reflected in J.D. Salinger's novel, The Catcher in the Rye.

**Good example:** In his book The Catcher in the Rye, J.D. Salinger conveys the message that hypocrisy is an inescapable presence in all of humanity. This theme is portrayed through Holden's interactions with others, his own reflections on himself, and in his obsession with innocence. **PLEASE NOTE:** *Your subpoints will be ways in which the theme is conveyed.* Holden's interactions with others, his own reflections on himself, and in his obsession with innocence. You will then devote one body paragraph to each subpoint.

**Please remember the following:**

**A formal thesis-based essay:**

- *Does not* use personal pronouns (I, me, you...I think, etc.)
- *Does not* use slang
- *Does not* present ideas without proof from the novel
- *Does not* assume the reader knows the story or the characters
- *Does not* use “this shows that” or “this shows that” in the final draft
  
- DOES use excellent grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure
- DOES use transition words and statements to keep the reader on track
- DOES use concrete examples for each idea presented
- DOES include commentary to tie the concrete detail into the thesis and the topic of the paragraph under which the example falls

## Introduction

- Contains attention-grabbing hook that is related to the essay's topic. Remember, avoid using questions. Instead, use a strong statement or a quote.
- The hook should be expanded upon in a bridge. The bridge should paraphrase the hook or push the idea presented in the hook one step further.
- Next, the intro should have a TAG (title, author, and genre) attached to a *brief* (one or two sentences) summary of the novel and how the events of the novel display the theme
- Presents thesis/claim (this is the theme and the message about the theme)

## Body paragraphs #1—Each body paragraph should be about a single **subpoint** and stay focused on ONE topic.

- Should contain a topic sentence that restates the claim and the given subpoint and ties it back to the theme
- The topic sentence should be followed by a chunk. Each chunk should contain:
  - \*\*a lead-in that explains what was happening in the story at the time of the quotation
  - \*\*the example/quote (properly punctuated with page number) from the story to prove the subpoint and thesis
  - \*\* at least two (preferably more) sentences of explanation/interpretation after that shows how that example proves the theme.
    - \*\*\**You can (and are encouraged to) have more than two sentences of commentary. The commentary SHOULD NOT summarize the novel. Rather, it should explain how the theme is shown.*
- **Next, has a transition words before the next chunk. Some examples are:  
For example, in fact, of course, for instance, as a result, moreover, however, consequently, for this reason, at last, eventually, finally, meanwhile, nevertheless, furthermore, more important, to begin with, etc.**
- The transition word is attached to the lead-in of the second chunk. Next, copy a second chunk into the paragraph. The topic sentence should be followed by a chunk (you should be able to copy this directly from your Quote Journal). Each chunk should contain:
  - \*\*a lead-in that explains what was happening in the story at the time of the quotation
  - \*\*the example/quote (properly punctuated with page number) from the story to prove the subpoint and thesis
  - \*\* at least two (preferably more) sentences of explanation/interpretation after that shows how that example proves the theme.
    - \*\*\**You can (and are encouraged to) have more than two sentences of commentary. The explanation SHOULD NOT summarize the novel. Rather, it should explain how the theme is shown.*
- Contains a closing sentence that brings the paragraph back to the thesis, explains the significance, and closes up the paragraph

## Conclusion:

- Should re-state thesis
- Should summarize main points presented in the essay
- Should state why the chosen theme is important—how does it relate to society today?
- Was the theme powerful? Explain why.