

Salinger's Fictional Families

The Caulfield Family

Holden Caulfield: A sixteen-year-old boy who's just flunked out of prep school for the second time. Sensitive and intelligent, he feels alienated from everyone around him—those he labels as “phonies.” He fears that there's no way to grow from childhood to adulthood without “selling out.”

Phoebe Caulfield: Although she's only ten years old, Holden's little sister Phoebe seems to have a wisdom he lacks. He cherishes her for her innocence, but she often seems more mature than he is.

Allie Caulfield: Holden's little brother has died of leukemia before the novel begins, but his impact is felt throughout. Holden carries with him a memento of his brother—his baseball glove that he'd inscribed with poems.

D.B. Caulfield: We meet Holden's older brother only through Holden's recollections. Holden admires him for a collection of short stories he wrote, but thinks D.B. has sold out by moving to Hollywood to be a screenwriter.

The Glass Family

Les Glass: A Jewish vaudeville performer, Les Glass is the father of the Glass family. After he retires, he enlists his children to appear on a radio quiz show to bolster the family's finances.

Bessie Gallagher Glass: Irish-born, the Glass mother was once a beautiful vaudevillian dancer. In *Zooey*, she is a “medium stout dancer,” and radiates common sense and love.

Seymour Glass: A genius and spiritual prodigy, the eldest Glass child is worshipped by his siblings. After serving in World War II, he has a nervous breakdown and commits suicide while on vacation in Florida (“A Perfect Day for Bananafish”).

Web Gallagher (Buddy) Glass: Salinger's alter-ego, Buddy is the second son of the Glass clan. He narrates *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*, *Zooey*, and *Seymour: An Introduction*. He sees himself as Seymour's disciple and chronicler.

Beatrice (Boo Boo) Tannenbaum: The Glass' oldest daughter lives with her husband and children in an affluent suburb. She is a central character in “Down at the Dinghy” and is referenced in other stories.

Walter F. Glass: Twin brother of Waker, Walt is killed in 1945 while serving with Occupation forces in Japan. He is funny and sweet, and appears as the college boyfriend of the main character in “Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut.”

Waker Glass: Walter's twin, Waker shows the self-sacrificing tendencies of a religious mystic. He converts to Catholicism and refuses to fight in World War II. After the war, he becomes a Carthusian monk. He is mentioned throughout the stories, but no single story is dedicated to him.

Zachary (Zooey) Glass: The best looking and most charismatic of the Glass children, Zooey becomes an actor, playing leading roles in television movies. He also deeply understands Seymour and uses his teachings to help his sister Franny recover from spiritual crisis (“Zooey”).

Frances (Franny) Glass: The youngest of the Glass children, Franny has a spiritual and emotional breakdown in “Franny.” In “Zooey,” her brother helps guide her to recovery with Buddhist teachings he learned from their older brother Seymour.

Works by Salinger

Many of Salinger's short stories were published in magazines between 1940 and 1965. Some of these were collected in *Nine Stories* or other short story anthologies. He also produced a number of short stories that have never been published or anthologized.

The Catcher in the Rye (1951) Salinger's first novel expands upon the story of Holden Caulfield, originally told in the short story “Slight Rebellion Off Madison,” which was published in *The New Yorker* in 1946.

Nine Stories (1953) A collection of short stories that had previously been published in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *World Review*. It includes some of Salinger's most popular stories, including:

- “*A Perfect Day for Bananafish*”: The first of the Glass family stories, this story recounts the day Seymour Glass commits suicide.
- “*Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut*”: An exposé of the shallowness of American suburbia, which was later adapted for the screen as *My Foolish Heart*, a sentimental love story that Salinger despised.
- “*For Esmé—with Love and Squalor*”: A story of an American soldier's encounter with a young girl in England on the eve of D-Day.
- “*Teddy*”: A series of vignettes in which a 10-year-old prodigy explores the tenets of Zen Buddhism.

Franny and Zooey (1961) Another installment in the story of the Glass family, this short story (“Franny”) and novella (“Zooey”) were published together. They trace the spiritual breakdown of Franny Glass, who struggles to move from ignorance to enlightenment, and her brother Zooey's attempt to help her find peace.

Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction (1963) Previously published in the *The New Yorker*, these two novellas continue the story of the Glass family. In *Raise High*, the second Glass son, Buddy, attends his brother Seymour's wedding, but when Seymour doesn't show, the bride's family question his behavior. Seymour is also written from Buddy's perspective, this time as a stream-of-consciousness reminiscence of Seymour.

Art Imitates Life

Writing as an art is an experience magnified.

—J.D. SALINGER

It's often said that art imitates life. In the case of J.D. Salinger, his life provided the raw materials for his art. From *The Catcher in the Rye* to the stories of the Glass family, Salinger embedded details of his experience into a web of fiction. More profoundly, his experience of World War II—the sense of devastation, moral outrage, and alienation—underlies all his works, even those that don't deal explicitly with the war.

I think, even, if I ever die, and they stick me in a cemetery, and I have a tombstone and all, it'll say "Holden Caulfield" on it...

—J.D. SALINGER

The Catcher in the Rye

- Like Holden Caulfield, Salinger grew up in Manhattan, and his family eventually moved to the same Park Avenue neighborhood where Holden's parents live.
- Both Salinger and his protagonist attended and flunked out of two prep schools.
- In school, Salinger managed the fencing team, just like Holden.
- Prior to his action in World War II, Salinger met and fell in love with Oona O'Neill, the daughter of playwright Eugene O'Neill, but she left him to marry actor Charlie Chaplin. She seems to have served as the model for the attractive but uncommitted Sally Hayes.

"A Perfect Day for Bananafish"

- Like Seymour Glass, Salinger served in World War II, suffered a nervous breakdown, and spent time in a hospital because of his mental condition.
- When he was a child, Salinger's father would float the boy in the waves and tell him to look for bananafish.
- The story is set in Daytona, Florida, where Salinger broke up with his first wife, and where he met Jean Miller, who was reflected in characters in this and other stories.

"For Esmé—with Love and Squalor"

- Like Salinger, the narrator Sergeant X serves as an intelligence officer at D-Day.
- After the war, Salinger met and befriended a 14-year-old girl, Jean Miller, with whom he corresponded for five years before beginning a relationship with her. She served as the model for Esmé.

You say you still feel fourteen. I know the feeling. I'm thirty-four and too much of the time I still feel like a sixteen-year-old Holden Caulfield.

—J.D. SALINGER IN A LETTER TO JEAN MILLER

Franny and Zooey

- The Glass children espouse the values of Zen Buddhism, a religious discipline that Salinger took up in the early 1950s.
- Salinger's second wife Claire served as the model for Franny. Like the character Franny, Claire owned the book *The Way of the Pilgrim*, a 19th century work of Russian mysticism with references to the practice of reciting the Jesus Prayer, which Franny recites.

To Discuss

- Salinger had said that if a movie of *A Catcher in the Rye* was ever made, he would be the only person who could play the role of Holden Caulfield. How do you see autobiography influencing this character? What experiences from his life may have led him to identify so strongly with this character?
- Do you need to know about an author's biography to appreciate a work? Why or why not? What do you gain from knowing what a writer took from his or her life?

A New York childhood is a special experience.

—WILLIAM MAXWELL, FICTION EDITOR OF
THE NEW YORKER, 1936-1976

Jerome David (J.D.) Salinger was born on January 1, 1919, in New York City, the son of a successful cheese importer and his Scottish-born wife. When he was thirteen, his affluent family moved to Park Avenue in Manhattan. In high school, he attended two private schools, but flunked out of both. Finally, his parents sent him to Valley Forge Military Academy in Wayne, Pennsylvania, where he continued to struggle in his studies.

Salinger's father wanted his son to follow in his footsteps, but the young Salinger wasn't interested. He aspired to be the theater critic for *The New Yorker* and began writing short stories.

After attending New York University and Ursinus College without graduating, he took an evening writing class at Columbia University, and became the protégé of Whit Burnett, the editor of *Story* magazine. Burnett bought one of Salinger's stories for publication, and other publications followed in a variety of magazines. Eventually, *The New Yorker* accepted "Slight Rebellion off Madison Avenue," a story featuring Holden Caulfield, but publication was deferred after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

It was a long way from a Park Avenue apartment to Normandy and War."

—EDWARD G. MILLER, AUTHOR

In 1942, Salinger was drafted into the Army. Salinger saw combat at three particularly brutal encounters: Utah Beach on D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, and the Battle of Hürtgen Forest. As part of the counter-intelligence effort, he later interrogated prisoners of war and was part of the force that liberated Kaufering Lager IV, one of the sub-camps of the Dauchau concentration camp. After witnessing the horrors of the camp, he checked himself into a civilian hospital in Nuremburg for "battle fatigue" (what we now call Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD).

You never get the smell of burning flesh out of your nose entirely, no matter how long you live.

—J.D. SALINGER

Throughout the war, Salinger continued to write, and carried the first six chapters of what would later be *The Catcher in the Rye* with him into battle. He also met Ernest Hemingway, who encouraged his writing.

After the war, Salinger worked as an intelligence officer for the Department of Defense as part of the effort to capture former Gestapo agents. During this work he met and married former Nazi Sylvia Welter in 1945. They soon divorced.

Back in the States, Salinger continued to pursue his dream of being a writer. *The New Yorker* finally published "Slight Rebellion off Madison Avenue," and in 1948, Salinger received even more attention with the publication of "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," a short story about war veteran Seymour Glass, also in *The New Yorker*. This story would introduce the Glass family, about whom Salinger would continue to write.

When "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1948, everybody woke up.

—DAVID HUDDLE, PROFESSOR AND FICTION WRITER

In 1951, Salinger achieved his greatest success with the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*. It had taken him ten years to write, and it took the reading public by storm, generating both praise and criticism.

Next, Salinger published a collection of his short stories from *The New Yorker* as *Nine Stories*, including one of his most popular stories, "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor." But as his fame from *Catcher* grew, Salinger began to retreat from the public eye. He moved to the small town of Cornish, New Hampshire, and practiced Zen Buddhism. In 1955, he married Claire Douglas and had two children, Margaret and Matthew.

Claire served as the model for the title character of his next Glass family story, "Franny." Later, he published the story along with the novella "Zoey." He followed these with two more novellas about the Glass family, *Raise High the Roof Beams, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*, published together in 1963. At home, he retreated more and more into his writing, which he did from a small cement bunkhouse apart from his house. There he worked on "Hapworth 16, 1924," a novella about Seymour Glass.

For the past two decades I have elected, for personal reasons, to leave the public spotlight entirely. I have shunned all publicity for over twenty years and I have not published any material during that time. I have become, in every sense of the word, a private citizen.

—J.D. SALINGER IN 1986

After 1965, Salinger refused to publish any more of his work, although he wrote every day. J.D. Salinger died on January 27, 2010, at the age of 91, of natural causes.

To Think About

- What was the impact of Salinger's army experience on his writing?
- Why do you think Salinger decided to stop publishing after 1965?

**So personal. So revealing.
It seemed like someone stripping the
layers away from the soul.**

—THOMAS WOLFE, NOVELIST

The Impact of *The Catcher in the Rye*

When *The Catcher in the Rye* was first released in 1951, it was hailed as innovative and revealing, written in a voice that spoke directly to readers who felt alienated from their families, schools, and communities.

With *The Catcher in the Rye*, readers heard a new voice in literature. Holden Caulfield was a new kind of protagonist—an authentic teenager speaking in the voice of his generation and expressing the anxieties of a character who doesn't fit in. He criticized the values of his time and resisted becoming a conventional member of his society. It was a perspective that hadn't been seen in literature before, and it struck a nerve with both the adults who were the intended audience of the novel and teenagers who saw themselves in the hero.

Your first experience of *The Catcher in the Rye* is not that you think Holden would be your friend. It's that you think Holden is you. Literally.

—EDWARD NORTON, ACTOR

Holden Caulfield offered an alternative to 1950s conformity, questioning and rejecting the values of his parents and teachers. It was a perspective whose time had come. *The Catcher in the Rye* anticipated and most likely influenced later cultural attitudes among young people—from the cry of angst in the films *A Rebel Without a Cause*, *The Graduate*, and *Less Than Zero*, to the upheaval and social change of the 1960s.

More than sixty years after its publication, *The Catcher in the Rye* is still popular. Each year, more than 500,000 copies are sold, with a grand total of more than 65 million copies sold since its initial release. By 1981, translations of the novel had been produced in 27 countries. It's said to be the 11th bestselling single-volume book of all time. In a recent Harris poll, it was ranked as the 10th favorite book of all time among American readers.

**I'm aware that a number of my friends
will be shocked, or shocked-saddened, over
some of the chapters in *The Catcher in the Rye*.
Some of my best friends are children. It's
almost unbearable to me to realize that my
book will be kept on a shelf out of their reach.**

—J.D. SALINGER

A Banned Book

But not everyone hailed the book. Within two years of its publication, *The Catcher in the Rye* was banned in some schools and libraries. It holds the distinction of being the most frequently taught book in high schools and the second most frequently censored.

Why was *The Catcher in the Rye* considered inappropriate for younger readers? For one thing, there's the language. Holden's voice is raw and unpolished, and he uses language that's typically kept out of schools. He also speaks explicitly about sexual issues—something that older readers and educators felt that students shouldn't be exposed to. But the chief concerns about the novel had less to do with the language and sexual content than it did with the perception that the novel was “un-American.” The tone of rebellion, anxiety, and questioning in the novel seemed to many critics to be dangerous and anti-social—and they didn't think young readers should experience such a vivid spokesman for these views.

To Discuss

- Why do you think many readers identify so closely with Holden Caulfield? Are there any scenes or ideas in the novel that you identify with?
- *The Catcher in the Rye* was published in 1951. What do you know about the historical events prior to and during this time? Can you speculate on how those events may have shaped the readers' responses to *Catcher* when it was first published?
- Were you surprised to learn that *The Catcher in the Rye* has been banned in so many schools? Do you think it's ever appropriate to ban books? If so, under what circumstances? If not, why?

Classroom Activities

WRITING PROMPT: Childhood in Literature

The Catcher in the Rye depicts Holden Caulfield on the brink of adulthood, struggling to understand the world he is about to enter and resisting its corrupting influence.

How does this compare with the way childhood is depicted in other works of American literature. Consider, for example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (published in 1960) or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (published in 1884). Compare how these novels present childhood to how it appears in Salinger's novel. How do these different presentations reflect the cultural climate in which each work was written?

TO CONSIDER: The Spiritual Quest

From the 1940s, Salinger committed himself to Eastern religious practices, particularly the philosophies of Zen Buddhism and Hindu Vedanta. Both traditions instruct adherents to seek insights into the deeper meaning of existence (enlightenment) through spiritual contemplation and the renunciation of things important in this world, such as fame and wealth.

Salinger prefaced his *Nine Stories* collection with a koan (a paradoxical anecdote or riddle from Zen Buddhism): "We know the sound of two hands clapping. But what is the sound of one hand clapping?" With koans such as these, Zen Buddhist monks contemplated an unsolvable riddle in an attempt to escape reason and make an intuitive leap into enlightenment.

Can we read Salinger's stories as a sort of koan for modern readers? What do their riddles suggest?

WRITING PROMPT: The Written Word

Throughout his life, Salinger was an avid writer. In addition to writing his novels and short stories, he carried on long correspondences by mail with a number of friends.

Imagine you are corresponding with J.D. Salinger. He's asked you to describe your feelings about school. You can't use text messages, social media, or photographs—just the written word on a piece of paper. Draft your letter, and notice how the reliance on the written word alone changes what you describe, how you describe it, and how deeply you describe it. Did you learn anything new about your feelings and your life by writing this letter?

TO DISCUSS: Salinger and Hollywood

Holden Caulfield has never been portrayed on film, and it was Salinger's wish that there would never be a film version of *The Catcher in the Rye*. But the figure of Holden has influenced many other film heroes, including those in *Rebel Without a Cause*, *The Graduate*, and *Less Than Zero*. What contemporary movies and television programs seem to represent figures inspired by Holden Caulfield? Why do these figures still appeal to us today?

TO CONSIDER: Exploring Death

"Then he went over and sat down on the unoccupied twin bed, looked at the girl, aimed the pistol, and fired a bullet through his right temple."

That's the last line of "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," Salinger's first story about Seymour Glass. Later, Salinger would write his Glass family stories, over which the specter of Seymour looms large. Why do you think Salinger decided to return to Seymour even after he had killed him off? Based upon his continuing interest in this character, what can you glean about Salinger's attitude toward death?

SALINGER

A FILM BY
SHANE SALERNO



Rating: TV-14 L This program contains some material that many parents would find unsuitable for children under 14 years of age.

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The *American Masters* collection brings a unique perspective to exploring the lives and works of some of our most enduring writers – those who have left an indelible impression on our nation’s cultural landscape. Each video in the *American Masters* collection includes a variety of supporting materials including discussion questions, background essays and teaching tips that help you to easily integrate the video into your teaching.

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JAMES BALDWIN: THE PRICE OF THE TICKET

A Writer in the Making

Renowned novelist and activist James Baldwin laid the foundation for his lifetime of achievement during his childhood in 1930s Harlem.

Preaching the Gospel of the Revolution

Through his speeches and in his polemical essay *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin became known as an articulate spokesman for the pain of black Americans while also preaching the gospel of equality to both whites and blacks.

All Men are Brothers

This video illustrates Baldwin’s intolerance for violence or racial hatred expressed by anyone, black or white. In the mid-1960s, Baldwin’s principles put him in conflict with Eldridge Cleaver and a new black militant faction, who advocated a reciprocal response to the violence they often experienced.

HARPER LEE: HEY, BOO

Character Study: Scout Finch

Scout Finch is one of the most beloved characters in all of American fiction and the main character of the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Students learn what makes Scout unique as well as what makes her a “typical American character.”

Is *To Kill a Mockingbird* Still Relevant Today?

Students learn about the social climate in the South when *To Kill a Mockingbird* was first published, and a few years later, when the film premiered.

To Kill a Mockingbird: Southern Reaction 1960

Highlighting observations from cultural and literary icons as well as average American citizens, the video features important commentary that addresses the issues presented in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and how the public reacted to the novel when it was first published in 1960.

Setting: A Portrait of a Southern Town in the 1930s

Through archival interviews, photographs, and present-day commentary (including an excerpt from an interview with Harper Lee), students learn what life was like for people living in the South during the Great Depression.

PHILIP ROTH: UNMASKED

I Work Every Day

Award-winning novelist Philip Roth elaborates on the details of his writing process and work environment preferences. Roth strongly believes that “life isn’t good enough” as a point of reference when it comes to creative writing. He says there is a journalistic side to writing novels, as he feels that authors need to gather facts to base their “inventions” on.

Even If They’re Wrong, They’re Right

Philip Roth shares many of the details of his unique writing process. For each book in development, Roth relies on the candid feedback of a trusted coterie of friends. Even if Roth disagrees with his friends’ suggestions, he says their feedback is vital because it opens up his thinking and gives him a fresh perspective on his work.

THE DAY CARL SANDBURG DIED

Carl Sandburg: Chicago

Published in 1914, the poem *Chicago* still captures the attention of readers and is as relevant today as it was in the early 20th century.

Carl Sandburg: Poet of the People

Students learn about Carl Sandburg and his early days as a “poet of the people.” In this video, the poems *Masses* and *Mill-Doors* are highlighted. Copies of the poems are provided for students to reference as they watch the video.

Sandburg and Lincoln

Though known for his poetry, Carl Sandburg is also the author of a biography of Abraham Lincoln. What began as a short story meant for children soon became a six volume biography that changed the way Americans viewed Lincoln and the Civil War.

The People, Yes

Published at the height of the Great Depression, Sandburg was inspired to write *The People, Yes* for those hit hardest by unemployment and poverty. In this video, literary figures, friends, family, and Sandburg himself discuss the importance of this poem when it was published in 1936, and why it still matters today.

Coming to PBS LearningMedia on February 1, 2014:

Classroom-ready resources drawn from the new *American Masters* film ***Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth***