

20th Century American Novel II

The Catcher in the Rye (1951) by J. D. Salinger

Allie's description

I wrote about my brother Allie's baseball mitt. It was a very descriptive subject. It really was. My brother Allie had this lefthanded fielder's mitt. He was left-handed. The thing that was descriptive about it, though, was that he had poems written all over the fingers and the pocket and everywhere. In green ink. He wrote them on it so that he'd have something to read when he was in the field and nobody was up at bat. He's dead now. He got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent. He was terrifically intelligent. His teachers were always writing letters to my mother, telling her what a pleasure it was having a boy like Allie in their class. And they weren't just shooting the crap. They really meant it. But it wasn't just that he was the most intelligent member in the family. He was also the nicest, in lots of ways. He never got mad at anybody (Ch. 5).

Allie's death

I was only thirteen, and they were going to have me psychoanalyzed and all, because I broke all the windows in the garage. I don't blame them. I really don't. I slept in the garage the night he died, and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it. I even tried to break all the windows on the station wagon we had that summer, but my hand was already broken and everything by that time, and I couldn't do it. It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie. My hand still hurts me once in a while when it rains and all, and I can't make a real fist any more... (Ch. 5)

Holden beaten

I kept sitting there on the floor till I heard old Stradlater close the door and go down the corridor to the can. Then I got up. [...] You never saw such gore in your life. I had blood all over my mouth and chin and even on my pajamas and bath robe. It partly scared me and it partly fascinated me. All that blood and all sort of made me look tough. I'd only been in about two fights in my life, and I lost both of them. I'm not too tough. I'm a pacifist, if you want to know the truth (Ch. 6)

Beaten again (Ch. 14)

About halfway to the bathroom, I sort of started pretending I had a bullet in my guts. Old Maurice had plugged me. Now I was on the way to the bathroom to get a good shot of bourbon or something to steady my nerves and help me really go into action. I pictured myself coming out of the goddam bathroom, dressed and all, with my automatic in my pocket, and staggering around a little bit. Then I'd walk downstairs, instead of using the elevator. I'd hold onto the banister and all, with this blood trickling out of the side of my mouth a little at a time. What I'd do, I'd walk down a few floors—holding onto my guts, blood leaking all over the place—and then I'd ring the elevator bell.

As soon as old Maurice opened the doors, he'd see me with the automatic in my hand and he'd start screaming at me, in this very high-pitched, yellow-belly voice, to leave him alone. But I'd plug him anyway. Six shots right through his fat hairy belly. Then I'd throw my automatic down the elevator shaft—after I'd wiped off all the fingerprints and all. Then I'd crawl back to my room and call up Jane and have her come over and bandage up my guts. I pictured her holding a cigarette for me to smoke while I was bleeding and all.

The goddam movies. They can ruin you. I'm not kidding.

I stayed in the bathroom for about an hour, taking a bath and all. Then I got back in bed. It took me quite a while to get to sleep—I wasn't even tired—but finally I did. What I really felt like, though, was committing suicide. I felt like jumping out the window. I probably would've done it, too, if I'd been sure somebody'd cover me up as soon as I landed. I didn't want a bunch of stupid rubbernecks looking at me when I was all gory.

(Ch. 14)

Lying to Mrs. Morrow

Old Mrs. Morrow didn't say anything, but boy, you should've seen her. I had her glued to her seat. You take somebody's mother, all they want to hear about is what a hot-shot their son is [...]

She shook her head. I had her in a trance, like. I really did [...]

"No, everybody's fine at home," I said. "It's me. I have to have this operation."

"Oh! I'm so sorry," she said. She really was, too. I was right away sorry I'd said it, but it was too late.

"It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain."

Spencer's description (A)

They each had their own room and all. They were both around seventy years old, or even more than that. They got a bang out of things, though—in a half-assed way, of course. I know that sounds mean to say, but I don't mean it mean. I just mean that I used to think about old Spencer quite a lot, and if you thought about him too much, you wondered what the heck he was still living for. I mean he was all stooped over, and he had very terrible posture, and in class, whenever he dropped a piece of chalk at the blackboard, some guy in the first row always had to get up and pick it up and hand it to him. That's awful, in my opinion (Ch. 2).

Spencer's description (B)

But if you thought about him just enough and not too much, you could figure it out that he wasn't doing too bad for himself. For instance, one Sunday when some other guys and I were over there for hot chocolate, he showed us this old beatup Navajo blanket that he and Mrs. Spencer'd bought off some Indian in Yellowstone Park. You could tell old Spencer'd got a big bang out of buying it. That's what I mean. You take somebody old as hell, like old Spencer, and they can get a big bang out of buying a blanket (Ch. 2)

Spencer's description (C)

The minute I went in, I was sort of sorry I'd come. He was reading the Atlantic Monthly, and there were pills and medicine all over the place, and everything smelled like Vicks Nose Drops. It was pretty depressing. I'm not too crazy about sick people, anyway. What made it even more depressing, old Spencer had on this very sad, ratty old bathrobe that he was probably born in or something. I don't much like to see old guys in their pajamas and bathrobes anyway. Their bumpy old chests are always showing. And their legs. Old guys' legs, at beaches and places, always look so white and unhairly (Ch. 2)

Holden's concept of love

JANE

“Jane Gallagher. Jesus.” I couldn’t get her off my mind. I really couldn’t. “I oughta go down and say hello to her, at least.”

“Why the hell don’t cha, instead of keep saying it?”

Stradlater said. I walked over to the window, but you couldn’t see out of it, it was so steamy from all the heat in the can. “I’m not in the mood right now,” I said.

Then I thought of giving Jane Gallagher's mother a buzz, and find out when Jane's vacation started, but I didn't feel like it. Besides, it was pretty late to call up.

I started toying with the idea, while I kept standing there, of giving old Jane a buzz—I mean calling her long distance at B.M., where she went, instead of calling up her mother to find out when she was coming home. You weren't supposed to call students up late at night, but I had it all figured out. I was going to tell whoever answered the phone that I was her uncle. I was going to say her aunt had just got killed in a car accident and I had to speak to her immediately. It would've worked, too. The only reason I didn't do it was because I wasn't in the mood. If you're not in the mood, you can't do that stuff right.

I thought of giving old Jane a buzz, to see if she was home yet and all, but I wasn't in the mood. What I did do, I gave old Sally Hayes a buzz.

I figured maybe I'd give old Jane a buzz and see if she was home for vacation yet. So I went in a phone booth and called her up. The only trouble was, her mother answered the phone, so I had to hang up. I didn't feel like getting involved in a long conversation and all with her.

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Sally