

LITERATURE SECTION A:
Post 1914 prose
The Catcher in the Rye

In the GCSE Literature examination you will be asked to write one question about the novel you have studied in class. You will have 45 minutes.

You will need to:

- Analyse the decisions the writer has made
- Explore the techniques used by the writer
- Understand how context can change our perception of the novel

Character



The exam board wants you to be able to talk about the characters in the novel. It wants you to explore the different interpretations of their personalities and the possible motivations for their actions.

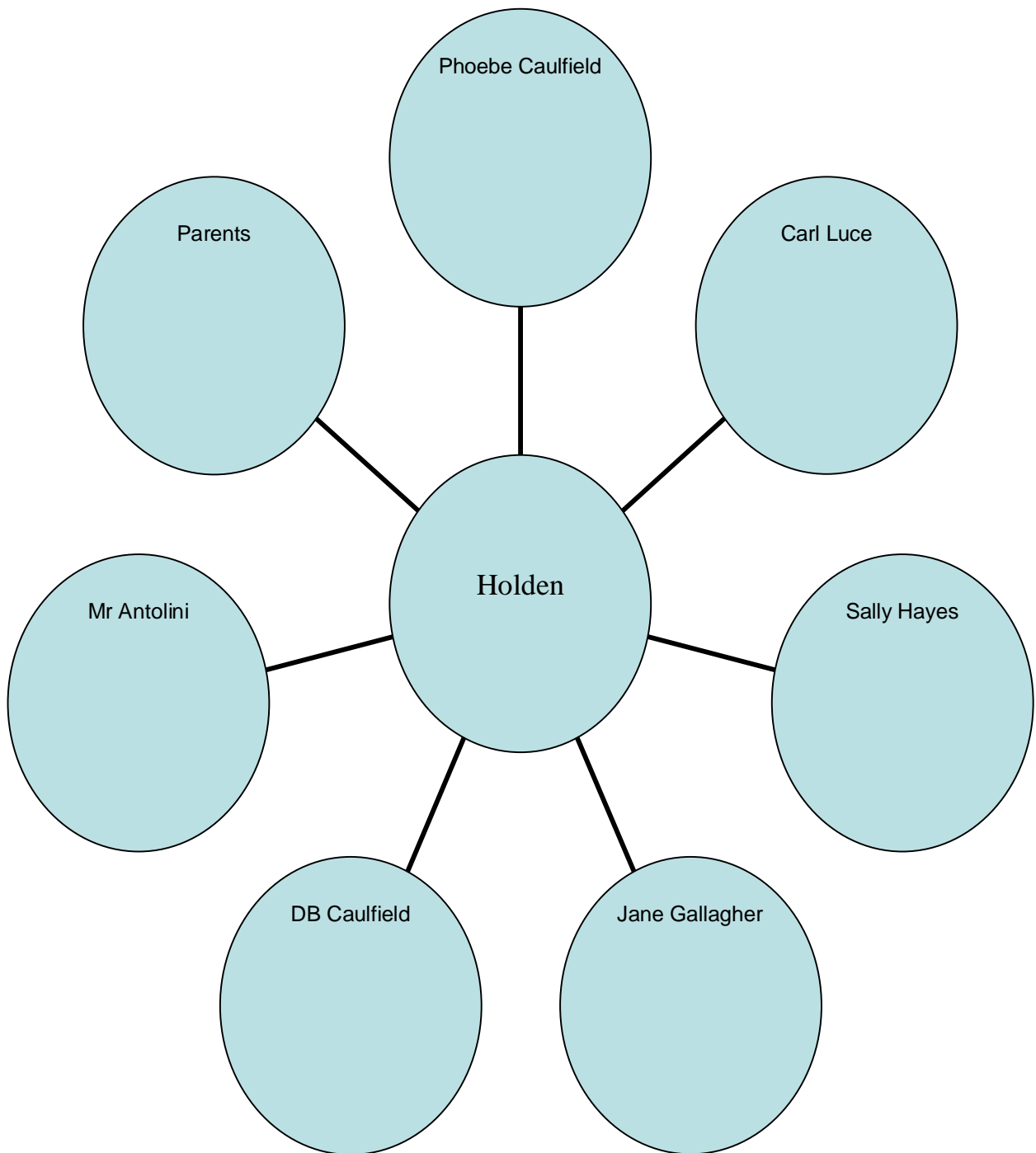
1. The story is told by Holden Caulfield. Therefore, it is his actions and motivations that would interest an examiner the most. In the table below are a number of things that Holden did in the novel. You need to decide what this tells us about Holden. In the final column you are expected to suggest an alternative perspective, with a different interpretation.

Event in the novel	What does it tell us about the character of Holden?	Is there another way of viewing it?
He loses the equipment for the fencing team which he captains. Therefore the team has to return to school without competing.		
He smashed up his parents' garage when he heard about the death of his younger brother Allie from Leukemia.		
He meets Mrs. Morrow on the train and lies to her twice. Once to say he liked her son and then to tell her he was returning home for an operation on a brain tumour.		
He gave two nuns some money in a café because he likes the fact that their motivations are different to his mother's.		
He breaks into his parents' apartment and speaks to his sister Phoebe.		

2. Complete this activity for other events in the book, until you form a full picture of Holden

Event in the novel	What does it tell us about the character of Holden?	Is there another way of viewing it?

3. We can also get to know Holden by looking at his relationships with other characters in the book. Getting to know these characters ourselves is difficult, as we only ever hear about them filtered through Holden. Fill in the circles below exploring what we learn about Holden from his opinions of these characters and what we learn about the characters themselves. You may wish to copy this diagram onto A3 paper.



Plot and Structure

Plot

The plot is the events in the novel, the story that is being told. It is important to know the plot well, as it will help you provide evidence to support any of your arguments.. However, in your examination essay you need to avoid retelling the story.

1. Below is a list of events from the novel. They happen over a three day period. Number them to put them in the order they appear in the novel. You will then have an overview of the plot of the novel. The first stage in the novel has been done for you.

Events	Plot
He watches Phoebe on the carousel	1. <i>He is in a psychiatric ward</i>
He is in a psychiatric ward	2.
He has a fight with Stradlater	3.
He tells us about James Castle	4.
He goes to see Phoebe at their home	5.
He is expelled from Pency's Prep	6.
He visits Mr Antolini	7.
He talks to the taxi driver about ducks	8.
He meets up with Sally Hayes	9.
He recounts the story of <u>The Catcher in the Rye</u>	10.
He gets drunk and goes to the park	11.
He checks into the Edmont Hotel	12.
He gets beaten up by Maurice, the pimp	13.
He is in a psychiatric ward	14.
He meets up with Carl Luce	15.

Structure

The structure of the novel is the way it is organised. This is much more important than the plot when answering examination questions, as it tells us a lot about the intentions of the writer, as they choose the way we hear about the events. The examiner is interested in your interpretation of how the structure of the novel changes our perspective of events.

2. We know that Holden is recounting the events from a psychiatric hospital; this is where the story begins and ends. We know that he is telling us about the three days in New York when he finally realises he has had a mental breakdown. What does this tell us about The Catcher in the Rye?

Setting and Context

Setting and context are often thought to be the same thing. They both are defined as the time and place the book is set in. However there are important differences and they produce different responses to the book.

Setting is the actual places the character visits and what the time is when he does this. They tell us something about the character and the effects of the environment on the character.

Context is the time and place the writer produced his novel and how this is different to ours. This changes the ideas, beliefs and attitudes of the reader to the events. This is a much more important idea, as it is part of the grade descriptions for the higher grade.



1. The setting of the book is important as it contributes to our understanding of Holden, as it has an impact on his personality. Below are the three places that Holden visits. Describe the things we learn about the places and the impact they have on Holden, explaining why they have this impact.

Pency Prep

.....
.....

New York City

.....
.....

Central Park and the museums

.....
.....

Tips:

- some of these places represent the ideas that Holden has
- these places have people in them who perhaps should have done better by Holden
- the places add to the atmosphere of the book and to Holden's emotions

2. To explore the context of a book it is important to do some research. Using the internet or books find something out about the topics introduced below. You should then try to explain how this knowledge helps us understand Salinger and "Catcher in the Rye" better.

Idea	Researched facts	Relevance to "Catcher in the Rye"
The book is set in America soon after WW2 when America was rich and beginning to be considered a super power. America believed itself to be the greatest country in the world.		
People and politicians at this time were very conservative. They were intolerant of people who tried to be different or to be an individual. It was at this time that McCarthy held his "witch" hunts.		
Before the 1950s there wasn't really such a thing as a teenager. During the 1950s American teenagers began to find an identity for themselves.		

3. The Catcher in the Rye was a very controversial novel. It was banned by a number of school districts. It is also renowned for being read by Mark Chapman who killed John Lennon and Lee Harvey Oswald who killed JFK. It is hard for us to understand today, in England, why it deserves this reputation. Try to find out why there is a difference in attitude between the different times by looking on the Internet.



Themes

These are the ideas behind the novel. Salinger wanted to tell a story but importantly he wanted to communicate important messages about the way he saw things.

1. What does Salinger have to say about each of the following ideas? For each idea that you suggest you need to say which part of the book makes you think this. Some bullet points have been given to help you.

<p>Theme 1: The relationships Holden has with other people in the novel, such as his parents, his sister, his peers and his teachers.</p>	
<p>Theme 2: Holden tries to be an Individual, rather than conforming to rules of the society.</p>	
<p>Theme 3: The difference between innocence and maturity and its effects on Holden/</p>	

2. Which of these do you believe to be the most important message in the novel? Sit down for 45 minutes and form an extended answer to this question.

Language and Style

1. The novel is written in the first person using the language of Holden. Therefore we only ever hear the opinions and descriptions of Holden. Can you pick out three examples of where this has a real impact on how we see the events in the novel?

a)

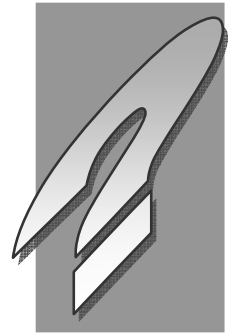
b)

c)

2. Because we hear the voice of Holden throughout, the language is quite distinctive. The novel uses slang, swear words, poor sentence structure, exaggeration and vague expression. Below is the opening to the novel. It clearly introduces us to the language and the style of the novel. Annotate the extract, labeling the language and the effects of the narrative perspective. Can you say what effect it has?

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it...

Answering Questions



The most important part of writing an essay on a novel is making sure you answer the question. It is easy to fall into telling the story; therefore you need to pick out the key word(s) and use topic sentences effectively.

1. Finding the key word(s) in the question is the first step to success. Look closely at some possible examination questions:

- a) Do you sympathise with the character of Holden Caulfield?
- b) Does Salinger create a believable character?
- c) What roles do women play in "Catcher in the Rye"?
- d) How does Salinger represent authority?
- e) How does Salinger use symbolism in "Catcher in the Rye"?
- f) How does Holden's way of telling the story affect the reader's response?
- g) Explore the theme of childhood in "Catcher in the Rye".
- h) "Catcher in the Rye" is a story about one individual's attempt to fight against society. Discuss.
- i) How important are Holden's relationships in understanding "Catcher in the Rye"?
- j) "Catcher in the Rye" covers three days in one boy's life. How does Salinger structure his novel so that the reader gets to know the story of Holden?

Pick out the key idea(s) from each of the questions above. The first one has been done for you:

- a) sympathy/ Holden
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)
- f)
- g)
- h)
- i)
- j)

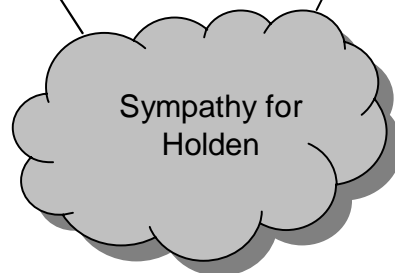
3. These key words are the words that should go in the middle of a mind map when you are planning. You are going to produce the plan for the first question in the list:

Do you sympathise with the character of Holden Caulfield?

The mind map has been started for you, complete it with as many ideas as you can think of.

School hasn't helped him

Swearing and abusive language makes him easy to dislike



Select the best four or five ideas from this mind map. These will be the sections of your essay. Before beginning to write it is important to put these ideas into a sensible order. Try this before moving on.

Model Answer and the mark scheme

Here is the mark scheme that your examiner will use to mark the essay that you write.

1. Circle the key words in the mark scheme.

Grade	Description
U	Something specific about the text Some specific features identified Some awareness of content of text
G	Familiarity with specific part(s) of a text; Familiarity with the narrative sequence; Reference to some detail(s); Simple comment; Simple response to text and task
F	Selection of appropriate material; awareness of explicit meaning(s); range of details, some inference/deduction; simple identification of a method or an effect; simple response to characters/ situations/ ideas
E	Support points made; generalization(s) about text/ subject matter; some comment on specific details; some awareness of specific details; some awareness of a writer at work; supported response to characters/ situations/ ideas
D	Some focus on question; awareness of feeling(s) and attitude(s); range of comment on specific details; awareness of effects intended/ achieved; explained response to character/ situation/ ideas.
C	Structured response to question; sustained relevant knowledge; appropriate comment on meaning/ style; understanding of how effects are achieved; effective use of details to support answer; sustained response to situations or ideas
B	Sustained and measured response to the question; some exploration; appreciation of writer's concerns/ attitudes/ ideas; details linked to writer's intentions and purposes; measured/ qualified response to writer's ideas and/ or methods
A	Exploratory response to terms of the question; insight into writer's methods, purposes and characteristics; developed exploration of context/ meaning/ response; insight into structure and significance of patterns of detail; evaluative
A*	Subtle/ forceful response to implications of the question; consistent insight; independent discovery and interpretation of significant details; convincing interpretation; close textual evaluation or analysis; independent, analytical, evaluative

2. In your own words explain what you have to do well to get the grade that you want.

Here is an answer to the question:

What roles do women play in "Catcher in the Rye"?

3. Think carefully about what grade you would give this essay and why.

There are a number of women in Holden's life in "The Catcher in the Rye". Women often appear in the book to illustrate Holden's youth, such as the prostitute Sunny. However, two women of greatest influences on Holden and his actions actually make no appearance in the book. His mother and his ex-girlfriend Jane Gallagher reoccur in Holden's thoughts and can be seen to contribute to his present state of mind.

Jane Gallagher is an important woman in Holden's life. Much of "The Catcher in the Rye" is written using flash backs. Holden remembers back to episodes when he perceived he was happy. Jane Gallagher is a big part of these memories, as she existed in his life before his brother died. As a character she seems to represent Salinger's central theme of innocence in this novel. Holden idolises Jane and does not want the image of her shattered. This is clear at the beginning of the book when he attacks Stradlater because he has been on date with Jane. Clearly Holden cannot bear the idea of Jane becoming part of the adult world that he despises.

Holden's mother, in contrast, very much reinforces the pain of his brother's death in his mind. There is a suggestion in Holden's account of his younger brother's death that his parents lied to him to spare him from the pain of knowing his brother was about to die. This resulted in Holden's violent response in their garage and his dislike of "phonies" that appears throughout the book. She is viewed badly in the novel and as readers we only have Holden's perspective of her behaviour. This is clearly illustrated when Holden compares her to the nuns he meets in the coffee shop. He sees their motives in collecting money as pure, whilst he condemns his mother's charity works as "phony", believing she only does it to make people like her. His mother has clearly hurt him, therefore as a reader we cannot trust Holden's perspective.

Sunny, on the other hand, is merely in the book to illustrate Holden's immaturity and inability to cope with the adult life he has chosen. Holden perceives he is old enough to have casual sex, which he seems to pursue when he first gets to New York. When he finally gets his chance with Sunny all he wants to do is talk. Sunny acts as a reminder to readers that Holden merely wants companionship and is too confused to understand this.

As with most things in The Catcher in the Rye, the women in the novel act as a tool to help us understand Holden and his mental state better. As we only ever view them through the warped perspective of Holden we can never truly get to know them as characters. Yet, Salinger cleverly allows insight into Holden's troubles through these interactions with women.

What grade would you give it? Why? How would they achieve the next grade?
