



How to use *The Catcher in the Rye* in the English classroom

Let the students enter and discuss the phony world

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Introduction

"Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become."

- C.S. Lewis

This quote is something that I hope will permeate this essay and let the reader understand what the purpose of this essay is: that literature enriches your life and put words on the indescribable.

Thesis

In this essay I have chosen to work with the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger in the English classroom in Upper Secondary School. I do this in order to provide students with a novel that deals with the prejudices a person carries with him or her due to the sex he or she was born with, and also the ordeal of growing up. Through the complex protagonist Holden Caulfield we meet both his good sides and bad sides and the ambivalent relationship between these two sides. We have the opportunity to follow how he and other people reason about men and women from different perspectives, and that provides us with the possibility to discuss traditional male and female gender roles and identity seeking.

These issues are raised in the curriculum for Upper Secondary School and that is why I have chosen to work with this perspective. *The Catcher in the Rye* is also a great resource for letting student develop their communicative competence and to practice their English in various ways which I will demonstrate in this essay as well.

Essay structure

I will discuss the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* through statements found in the *Curriculum for the non-compulsory school system* (Lpf 94) wherein we can read that one goal to attain, when a national programme is completed, is that the student "can use specialist literature,

fiction and other forms of culture as a source of knowledge, insight and joy” (skolverket.se). In the section *Fundamental Values* the curriculum states that “the school shall actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for men and women. Pupils shall be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudice as to gender differences” (skolverket.se), and that this should pervade throughout all education. In the section *Norm and Values* we can read that the teacher shall “openly present and together with pupils analyse different values, views and problems as well as the consequences of these” and “make clear the fundamental values of Swedish society and together with the pupils discuss conflicts between these values and reality”(skolverket.se). The fundamental values of the Swedish society are here explained by the Minister for Integration and Gender Equality: “Sweden shall be a tolerant and humane society characterized by the respect for the democracy, constitutional state, equality and human right and freedom. These things are the foundation for the Swedish society, the mutual common principles” (My translation, sweden.gov.se). The Swedish Parliament raised these issues in the curriculum for a particular reason: these issues were seen as extra important. For this reason I have chosen to work with the issues mentioned in my thesis statement above. I will prove that *The Catcher in the Rye* is an excellent novel to use to fulfil these particular goals in the curriculum since the students get the opportunity to encounter the many different perspectives people have when they talk about men and women. They also acquire a chance to discuss other important issues such as why we have certain opinions about other people and how difficult it is to grow up.

I will also discuss the book on the basis of the syllabus e.g. the goal that says that students should “be able to actively take part in discussions, and be able to present and deal with the merits of opposing arguments” (skolverket.se). Since this book is an advanced book it is most suitable for students in Upper Secondary School, English B course. These students are also at a suitable age to discuss the concept of gender roles and identity seeking in a wider sense. Students in Upper secondary school spend a great deal of their life in school and it is here they get the opportunity to speak with other students in their age, as well as adults. In school they create an identity and they get the opportunity to reflect over different conceptions of life and how to discuss these from different perspectives. Through literary discussion in the classroom, where I and the students use *The Catcher in the Rye* as a

foundation, I can start a process within the students and make them think about difficult issues that they will encounter in their everyday life, especially issues about gender roles and identity seeking. These issues will be dealt with in the section on gender in *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Chapter outline

In the first chapter I will go through the concept of gender to form a general understanding of the concept since it is used in my thesis. I proceed with the history behind *The Catcher in the Rye* to create an understanding about the significance of the novel and why it was seen as such a rebellious book. *The Catcher in the Rye* was seen as an obscene book because it was full of profane language and criticised the values found in the adult world. This section will be a foundation for a further discussion in the section ***The Catcher in the Rye as basis for a discussion of gender in an emotional and social context***. Here I try to point out which issues can be dealt with while reading this book by selecting quotes from the book to support my thesis. The issues I have chosen to highlight are quotes that show how Holden and other people reason about men and women's conduct, and also the conduct that adults and adolescents indulge in. The students can discuss if the thoughts that Holden engage in can be applied on adolescents in today's society or if it the opinions that Holden has are typical for the 1950's. They can also discuss if the opinions that Holden has are considered conservative or if any of his opinions still are found in today's society.

How the discussion about these issues will be put in practice will be shown in the second chapter **Pedagogical and didactic reasons for working with *The Catcher in the Rye***. Here I will demonstrate how to use *The Catcher in the Rye* in the classroom in order to provide the students with the right tools to discuss the issues that I raised in the first chapter, and also how they will receive the opportunity to practice their English in various ways.

Chapter 1

The concept of gender

At first glance *The Catcher in the Rye* is not the most obvious book to use in order to discuss gender roles, but through Holden's thoughts and the conversation with other people we experience different perceptions that people might have about men and women. Through *The Catcher in the Rye* we get an indirect opportunity to think about the factors that define us as men and women and what society expects from us, and this I can use as a foundation for discussion in the classroom. Since I have chosen to work with *The Catcher in the Rye* in order to start discussions and mental processes about gender roles, I will here clarify what I mean when I use the concept gender.

Gender determines which behaviour and appearances are expected by a man or a woman. One example could be that women are expected to be in contact with their emotions, and men are expected to use their sense. Another example is that men are expected to express and indulge in their sexuality more openly than women. People are often so used by these fixed orders that we do not reflect over why and how women and men act as they do.

Through social interaction between both sexes, the same sex and through media, we mould ourselves into what gender we "belong to" and adjust to that gender role. We are directly or indirectly taught how we should behave, feel and reason in order to fit in to the gender that society has chosen for us. This is something that Raewyn Connell brings up in her book *Gender*, where she claims that gender is something that we are being taught by "priests, parents, teachers, advertisers, retail mall owners, talk-show hosts and disc jockeys" (Connell 4). Further she argues that they "help to create and disseminate gender difference, by displays of exemplary masculinities and feminities" (Connell 4) Connell claims that gender is not a preset way of being, and she further quotes Simone de Beauvoir who claimed that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Connell 4). This concerns men as well as Connell claims "one is not born masculine, but acquires and enacts masculinity, and so becomes a man" (Connell 4).

History in the 1950's USA and the influence of *The Catcher in the Rye*

Before introducing *The Catcher in the Rye* in the classroom I will present the history behind the book. I will raise the question why it was seen as such a rebellious book and why it became so popular among adolescents and why it has kept popularity up until today. As I will show, during the 1950's the concept teenager became much more established in the USA. The teenagers started questioning why adults reprimanded adolescents for doing an immoral action, and then the adults engaged in immoral conduct themselves. This double standard was something that *The Catcher in the Rye* raised and that is why so many adults objected that this novel should be used in school. Parents also complained about the fact that the novel contained foul language and thoughts about having sex. This could influence adolescents in the wrong way. Further, the issues that Salinger raised in *The Catcher in the Rye* are timeless; adolescents have always been seeking after an identity and been contemplating about what they really feel about something. This is shown through Holden and has been a consolation for adolescents from the 1950's up until today.

By introducing the novel by using quotes from affected parents and telling the students the history behind the book, I will not only establish an interest in reading the novel and an understanding why I chose to use this particular book, but also to make the students



Figur 1 A typical bobby soxer

understand the significance of the book. I would also like to discuss why J.D. Salinger chose to write the book about an alienated adolescent who considers the adult world to be phony, and why Holden feels that it is so important to protect the children from this world by keeping them innocent. By doing this as a pre-reading activity the students will feel more enticed to read the book.

As Sanford Pinker observes in his book *The Catcher in the Rye; Innocence under Pressure*, after the Second World War, the USA had a time of growing economy and a flourishing market. The suburbs grew; the middle class was firmly established and thus lead to the consumers' market hitting the roof. When countries and capital cities

in Europe had been destroyed, the cities in the USA were intact. This led to a “material prosperity” (Pinsker 4).

Social conformity was very strong and people were engaged in the church and the home. The suburban areas grew and they all looked the same as a result of social conformity. The men had work and the women, who most of the time were house-wives, had all the new kitchen appliances that were out on the market. The 1950’s was “a time of conservative politics, economic prosperity, and above all, social conformity” (Pinsker 3).

In her book *Teenagers*, Grace Palladino argues that the 1950’s was also the era when the usage of the term “teenager” began to spread, but the era started with the “bobby soxers”. They were the swing fans who wore saddle shoes, skirts and sweaters and showed a little too much bare skin when they danced to their favourite music sung by Frank Sinatra. Advertisers saw a golden opportunity in the new consumer group that had been formed and in 1941 the term “teenager” was introduced (Palladino 52). Teenagers wanted to be independent and that led to young men and women turning to magazines or their friends for advice (Palladino 98). These post-war teenagers had other expectations than teenagers before them, and especially when it came to the economic prosperity that their families experienced (Palladino 98). Teenagers could afford to go to movies and spend time together without parents. This opportunity led to teenagers being more sexually permissive but there were of course standards that had to be met and the girls set those standards. Palladino further argues that girls were not allowed to be as sexual permissive as boys if they wanted to get married in the future.

The 1950’s was also the era when teenagers started to rely on their own abilities, views and life. They thought of lying adults as phonies and this is where *The Catcher in the Rye* makes its entrance (Palladino 173). Holden Caulfield stands for many things that the teenagers during the 1950’s stood for; he experiences the same sexual confusion as other teenagers did at this time and he too experiences the hypocrisy that adults indulged in. When analyzed from a contemporary view, *The Catcher in the Rye* holds a conservative view of moral standards, but that opens for a discussion about values of today’s society and what has changed or not changed (Fisher and Silber). As Stephen J. Whitfield argues in his article *Cherished and Cursed: Toward a Social History of The Catcher in the Rye*, many adolescents throughout the USA have identified themselves with Holden’s alienation, and it was actually the adolescents that made the teachers aware of the qualities of the book when it first

came. The students advised the teachers to use the book instead of the other way around, the latter being more conventional at that time (Whitfield 568)

When *The Catcher in the Rye* was published it was censored because it was considered obscene and contained vulgar language. The book also spoke against the values found in the 1950's USA, such as the importance of religion, the teacher profession and home life. In California a parent objected that *The Catcher in the Rye* should not be used in school since the book contained "crude, profane and obscene language" (Whitfield 575). At another school a father wanted to take his daughter out of school because the teacher had provided the students with the novel, and he further claimed that Salinger used a language that "no sane person would use" (Whitfield 577). The book was the most censored book in the USA but at the same time the most taught book in public schools, so the society had a contradictory apprehension about the book. Critics also produced proof of the impropriety of reading the book when it was revealed that John Lennon's murderer had a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* in his pocket when performing the murder, and that he also quoted the book when arrested (Whitfield 571).

All these events are worth raising in the classroom as a pre-reading activity to entice the students to read *The Catcher in the Rye*, and this will be dealt with further in the section on pedagogy and didactics.

The Catcher in the Rye as basis for a discussion of gender in an emotional and social context

I first came in contact with this novel at my VFU-school (the school where I get the opportunity to practice my teaching abilities) where *The Catcher in the Rye* is used to a great extent. It is over fifty years old but can still appeal to adolescents in today's society as the issues that are dealt with in the novel are timeless, which we found in the section on history. In the novel we can find typical questions that run through adolescents' head, such as having ambivalent feelings towards sex and entering the adult world. These issues, that always have been a part of adolescents mind, will be demonstrated in this section.

I have the opinion that because this book is timeless it qualifies as a novel that even would fit in the canon. Vera Panova expresses her feelings about *The Catcher in the Rye* as following "But this novel about a loafer, a petty liar, a swaggering dandy, a strange, unlucky young creature, a novel outwardly so simple, but so complex in its inner structure, creates a whirlwind of feelings and thoughts...This is the hallmark of a really important book" (Bloom 59). As Vera Panova claims, this book can start processes within the adolescents and force them into contemplating what they really think about the issues that I will raise in this chapter. In the end of the chapter I will summarise what these issues are and how they will be dealt with in the classroom. This will be further discussed in the section on pedagogy and didactic where I will demonstrate how to use the novel practically in book talks.

The syllabus for English B comprises goals to aim for and goals to attain. One goal to attain is the one that says that students should "be able to read, summarise and comment on the contents of longer literary texts" (skolverket.se). By using the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* the goal mentioned in the previous sentence can be fulfilled, but my main reason for choosing this novel as a longer literary text is not solely because there are goals in the syllabus that need to be fulfilled. There is much more to gain from teaching literature than just being able to read long texts. As Louise M Rosenblatt claims:

Because the literary experience tends to involve both the intellect and the emotions in a manner that parallels life itself, the insights attained through literature may be assimilated into the matrix of attitudes and ideas, which constitute character and govern behaviour. Hence the opportunity for students to develop the habit of reflective thinking within the context of an emotionally coloured situation. (Thomson 72)

I will show that *The Catcher in the Rye* has ample examples of emotional situations that appeal to adolescents, and the novel can furthermore be used to illuminate the issues from the curriculum that I raised in the introduction, that “the school shall actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for men and women. Pupils shall be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudice as to gender differences” (skolverket.se) and “openly present and together with pupils analyse different values, views and problems as well as the consequences of these” (skolverket.se).

In their book *Literature in the Language Classroom. A resource book of ideas and activities*, Collie and Slater claim that literature “says something about fundamental human issues, and which is enduring rather than ephemeral”(3). These human issues can be found in *The Catcher in the Rye* where Holden, the protagonist mulls over issues of his and women’s sexuality, e.g.:

The thing is, most of the time when you’re coming pretty close to doing it with a girl-a girl that isn’t a prostitute or anything, I mean- she keeps telling you to stop. The trouble with me is, I stop. Most guys don’t. I can’t help it. You never know whether they really want you to stop, or whether they’re just scared as hell, or whether they’re just telling you to stop so that if you do go through with it, the blame’ll be on you, not them (Salinger 92).

As I claimed in the section on history this quote clearly demonstrates the moral standards about sexuality among adolescents during the 1950’s. This quote could be put in a contemporary context as it allows an opening to discuss if sexual attitudes have changed or if they still remain the same in today’s society, and if so, why? Are there sexual moral standards that will change over time or will they persist? The above issues can also be applied on the goal to aim for in the syllabus that says that the students should: “improve their ability to read with good understanding literature in English and reflect over texts from different perspectives” (skolverket.se). The perspectives brought up in *The Catcher in the Rye* are strictly Holden’s own perspectives, as he is the narrator, but other peoples reasoning in the book offers other perspectives. The students can discuss why Holden and the people he meets have these certain perspectives. The students can also discuss whether they agree with them or not. The novel also provides us with the opportunity to discuss important issues, aside from why we have different gender roles and what is expected of us, such as how adolescents reasoned in the 1950’s, both in Sweden and the USA and how they reason now. Do the students think that some opinions are difficult to lose with the consequences of always remaining in society? Are there any cultural differences between the USA and

Sweden and why do cultural differences exist? This correspond to the goal in the curriculum that claims that school should “make clear the fundamental values of Swedish society and together with the pupils discuss conflicts between these values and reality”(skolverket.se).

As Whitfield argues, the adolescent can identify with the struggle that Holden goes through, especially when it comes to sex, something that occupies Holden’s thoughts a great deal. There is no solution to the struggle and no salvation, but there is consolation (Whitfield 569). Everybody who has been an adolescent goes through this, you are not alone. Take for example the encounter he has with the prostitute woman Sunny. At first he is trying to be this sophisticated young man who wants to belong to the adult world and having made sexual encounters. When all is said and done Holden does no longer want to have sex with Sunny since he feels sorry for her. Holden fears the final step towards the adult world, which is to have sex, mainly because Holden distrust the adult world so deeply due to all the phoniness (Bloom 54).

I took her dress over to the closet and hung it up for her. It was funny. It made me feel sort of sad when I hung it up. I thought of her going in a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing she was a prostitute and all. The salesman probably just thought she was a regular girl when she bought it. It made me feel sad as hell-I don’t know exactly why” (Salinger 96)

Sunny embodies all the struggles that Holden has within him, specifically the struggles between searching for emotional companionship and wanting to indulge in sexual actions with women. The students can contemplate why Holden suffer from these ambivalent positions and here no right answers are provided. Is it normal to have ambiguous feelings about emotions and sexual relationships? The above quote is a perfect example of how literature can make us realise how one can interpret every situation in ones existence in many different ways (Amborn 24). Further, through this quote, Sunny’s life and how she ended up as a prostitute and how we look upon prostitutes can be raised. Why do we have a certain view or opinion about people, e.g. Sunny? This is perfect evidence on how literature can help the reader to develop an emotional engagement in humans’ living conditions (Lindö 13). The discussion about these important issues also correspond to the goal in the curriculum mentioned earlier, that teacher shall “openly present and together with pupils analyse different values, views and problems as well as the consequences of these” (skolverket.se).

Holden's meeting with Sunny stands in stark contrast to the relationship he has with his little sister Phoebe, who represents everything that is innocent. Sunny has lost her innocence and it is too late to save her but Phoebe still has a chance to remain innocent and that is why Holden is anxious about Phoebe remaining in childhood. Phoebe really cannot do anything wrong; she has Holden's unconditional love. This becomes clear when he visits her school and sees that someone has written 'fuck you' on the wall:

It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how they'd wonder what the hell it meant, and then finally some dirty kid would tell them-all cockeyed, naturally, what it meant, and how they'd all *think* about it and maybe even *worry* about it for a couple of days. I kept wanting to kill whoever'd written it.
(Salinger 201)

The students can discuss if Holden would reason differently if Phoebe was his little brother. Do the students think that Holden feels that he has to protect her from men like Stradlater, Holden's unscrupulous roommate?

Phoebe is also the only one who challenges Holden and whom he listens to: "–You don't like anything that's happening. It made me even more depressed when she said that. –Yes I do. Yes I do. Sure I do. Don't say that. Why the hell do you say that? –Because you don't. You don't like any schools. You don't like a million things. You don't" (Salinger 171). Finally, Holden finds out one thing that he likes, or what he would like to be. He tells Phoebe about a daydream he has, where he stands on a cliff and looks upon children playing in a rye field. He tries to save the children that come too close to the cliff, and he becomes the catcher in the rye (Salinger 173). Baumbach claims that Holden tries to be "the protector and savior of innocence" (Bloom 65). The students can think about why Holden is so anxious to keep the children innocent. Why does he want to protect them from growing up? This is important for them to discuss as this probably is a part of their own identity seeking.

Another thought that Holden has about women is when he thinks about necking with them: "I mean, most girls are so dumb and all. After you neck them for a while, you can really *watch* them losing their brains" (Salinger 92). In *Sex, Violence and Peter Pan: J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye (1951)*; Paul Bail writes that this quote shows that Holden is disturbed by this situation since he feels that there are expectations put on him. This is an issue that can be raised in the classroom and discussed. Is it a contemporary problem that can be applied on adolescents of today's society, i.e. do the students think that teenage boys feel

that they have to live up to this prejudice because it is masculine to think about sex all the time? What prejudices do we have about men and women? To raise the discussion about these issues correspond to the goal in the curriculum that claims that “the school shall actively and consciously further equal rights and opportunities for men and women. Pupils shall be encouraged to develop their interests without prejudice as to gender differences” (skolverket.se)

All issues that can be raised in the classroom can be dealt with in different ways and could provide a chance for the students to work on their other skills, such as communicating through speech and listening to oral discussions. These benefits will be dealt with in the section on pedagogy and didactics.

Another reason for using this book is that the adolescents can identify with the struggles of being a teenager and how difficult it is to have expectations and demands put upon you. The protagonist also struggles with his identity and how he is perceived by others. Holden is tired of the conformity created by the adult world and he does not want to fit in. An example of a stereotyped adult he finds particularly phony is an old head-master of his, Mr Haas, who judges people on their appearance, ignores them and then spends time with someone he thinks is worthy of his attention. To quote Holden: “I can’t stand that stuff. It drives me crazy” (Salinger 14). He likes the non-conformist and he tries to strive towards that and that is why this book appeals to adolescents, because as Amborn claims: “reading contributes to a rebellion and the creation of an identity among adolescents, and without adolescent rebellion the society collapses” (my translation 26). I as a teacher can ask the students if they agree with this or not. Are adolescents more sincere than adults?

Holden respects women who are genuine and regard them as intelligent, but he disrespects the conformist phony ones that try to live up to their stereotyped gender role. A phony in Holden’s eyes is someone who acts in a certain way in order to adjust themselves to other people’s moral opinions. On one occasion Holden phones a girl he has been dating, Sally Hayes, in order to take her out on a date. He used to think that she was intelligent because she knows a lot about literature, but he now feels that he has seen through her and has started to regard her as a phony. This can be seen in the conversation he has with her: “–Swell. Well, listen. I was wondering if you were busy today. It’s Sunday, but there’s always one or two matinees going on Sunday. Benefits and that stuff. Would you care to go?

–I'd love to. Grand. *Grand*. If there's one word I hate, it's grand. It's so phony. For a second, I was tempted to tell her to forget about the matinee" (Salinger 106). This quote can be an opening for students to discuss affectation and if they think that many people in their age engage in this, and if so, why? Further, Sally tells Holden some truths about what his future is going to be like when Holden tries to persuade Sally to go with him to Vermont and live there. Sally does not like the idea since they are practically children and that they will have "[...] oodles of time to do those things-all those things. I mean after you go to college and all, and if we would get married and all" (Salinger 133). This makes Holden angry since he knows what will happen after college, which is that he would get a job in an office and live the everyday life he is trying to avoid. This is something to discuss with the students, i.e. what they feel about this. Are the same expectations put on them? Is it a problem in our society that everybody wants to realise themselves? Can you be happy with a nine to five job? Is it normal to have ambiguous feelings about entering adult life?

A girl that Holden does respect is Jane Gallagher who he thinks a great deal of. She is the only girl he really gets close to and he describes their relationship like this: "I really got to know her quite intimately. I don't mean it was anything physical or anything-it wasn't-but we saw each other all the time. You don't always have to get sexy to know a girl" (Salinger 76). Jane symbolizes the innocent love that Holden searches for and this could be the reason for Holden attacking his roommate Stradlater for taking Jane out on a date. Suddenly, she is not innocent anymore and this is very disturbing for Holden (Bloom 68). Even though Holden has a complex relationship towards women, which is that he loves them and loathes them at the same time; in his conversation with Luce we can see that he has good common principles when it comes to women:

–You still going around with that same babe you used to at Whooton? The one with the terrific-
 –Good God, no, he said.
 –How come, what happened to her?
 –I haven't the *faintest* idea. For all I know, since you ask, she's probably the Whore of New Hampshire by this time.
 –That isn't nice. If she was decent enough to let you get sexy with her all the time, you at least shouldn't talk about her that way.
 –Oh, God!" old Luce said. Is this going to be a typical Caulfield conversation? I want to know right now.
 –No, I said, but it isn't nice anyway. If she was decent and nice enough to let you-
 –*Must* we pursue this horrible trend of thought?
 (Salinger 145)

Quotes like this highlight issues that adolescents think about and prejudices that people have about women and men. This could lead to discussions that are meaningful for them, not only in their current state but in the future as well since questions like these always are current affairs. This discussion also correspond to the statement in the curriculum that claims that the teacher shall “openly present and together with pupils analyse different values, views and problems as well as the consequences of these” (skolverket.se)

Whitfield writes that Holden “values sex that comes from caring for another person and rejects its sordidness” (Whitfield 596) as can be seen in the following quote:

I can even see how it might be quite a lot of fun, in a crumby way, and if you were both sort of drunk and all, to get a girl and squirt water or something all over each other's faces. The thing is though, I don't like the idea. It stinks, if you analyze it. I think if you don't really like a girl, you shouldn't horse around with her at all, and if you do like her, then you're supposed to like her face, and if you like her face, you ought to be careful about doing crumby stuff to it, like squirting water all over it (Salinger 62)

This somewhat ambivalent reasoning can also be seen in the following quote by Holden “– You know what the trouble with me is? I can never get really sexy – I mean *really* sexy - with a girl I don't like a lot. I mean I have to *like* her a lot. If I don't, I sort of lose my goddam desire for her and all” (Salinger 148). Here we can see that Holden stand in contrast to his roommate Stradlater, who objectifies women. Holden does not want to become like Stradlater who separates sex from feelings. Stradlater is Holden's roommate and he is what Holden would call a real phony. He fits into the template of what a typical Pencey Prep boy would be like because he is an athletic boy and he has a “year book” look. Holden describes him as a secret slob who is very self-conceited and he would not hesitate to exploit other people (Salinger 28). Stradlater is also condescending towards women and calls them pigs when he is done with them (Salinger 30). He is not interested in Jane and how Holden knows her, except from when Holden tells him about Jane's step father and how he would walk around the house naked (s. 30). Further, Holden describes Stradlater as unscrupulous which we can see evidence of here:

What he'd do was, he'd start snowing his date in this very quiet , sincere voice-like as if he wasn't only a very handsome guy but a nice, sincere guy too. I damn near puked, listening to him. His date kept saying, –No- please. Please, don't. Please. But old Stradlater kept snowing her in this Abraham Lincoln, sincere voice, and finally there'd be this terrific silence in the back of the car (Salinger 49).

Here we see two perspectives represented: On one side Holden who feels that you should respect women and on the other side Stradlater, who sees women as just another trophy to win. These two perspectives are an interesting foundation for discussion in the classroom because it is important to make the students consider what they think about this in order to make them practice their ethical considerations. The importance to take personal standpoints is found in the curriculum: “for this reason teaching in different subjects shall deal with this perspective and provide pupils with a basis as well as support their ability to develop personal standpoints” (skolverket.se).

Holden wanders the streets of New York and decides to visit his old teacher Mr. Antolini, who he has great respect for and actually does not consider as a phony adult. Mr. Antolini has had a party and offers Holden to sleep on the couch. Holden wakes up and discovers that Mr. Antolini is caressing Holden’s head, something that is very confusing for Holden:

I felt something on my head, some guy’s hand. Boy, it really scared hell out of me. What it was, it was Mr. Antolini’s hand. What he was doing was, he was sitting on the floor right next to the couch, in the dark and all, and he was sort of patting me on the goddam head. Boy, I’ll bet I jumped about a thousand feet. –What the hell ya doing?” I said. –Nothing! I’m simply sitting here admiring- –What’re ya doing, anyway? I said over again. I didn’t know what the hell to say-I mean I was embarrassed as hell”.

(Salinger 191-192)

Holden leaves the apartment and sits down at the Grand Central where he starts to think about the experience with Mr. Antolini: “I mean I wondered if just maybe I was wrong about thinking he was making a flitty pass at me. I wondered if maybe just liked to pat guys on the head when they’re asleep” (Salinger 195). During the 1950’s a man was absolutely not allowed to act as a “flit” or just as worse, to be touched by one. As Carol and Richard Ohmann argue in their article *Universals and the Historically Particular* a man was supposed to fit into the masculine norm, like Stradlater, and tenderness between two men was frowned upon. This can be raised in the classroom and be discussed if this is a contemporary problem. Can men of today’s society show affection towards each other without being regarded as “flits” or do these prejudices still prevail? Can women show affection towards each other and not be regarded as homosexuals? Can men and women express their feelings in similar ways?

To sum up, some issues that I have raised in this section are:

- Are there sexual moral standards that will change over time or will they persist?
- Why do cultural differences exist?
- Why we have a certain view or opinion about people, e.g. Sunny?
- Can men and women express their feelings in similar ways?
- Is it normal to have ambiguous feelings about entering adult life?
- What prejudices do we have about men and women?
- Is it normal to have ambiguous feelings about emotions and sexual relationships?

These issues can help student to develop their emotional and reflective thinking as Rosenblatt claimed in the opening of this section. To discuss these issues also correspond to the curriculum which claims that “ethical perspectives are of importance for many of the issues that are taken up in the school. For this reason teaching in different subjects shall deal with this perspective and provide pupils with a basis as well as support their ability to develop personal standpoints” (skolverket.se).

Chapter 2

Pedagogical and didactic reasons for working with *Catcher in the Rye*

In this section I will demonstrate how to use the issues that I brought up in the previous section. The reason for this is to provide the students with the right tools to get the most use out of this novel but also, above all, to help them with practicing their English in as many ways as possible which is the main objective in the English classroom.

As Bo Lundahl argues in his book *Läsa på främmande språk* we should provide the students with books that concern them and are meaningful, but the text shall also challenge the reader without being a struggle (77). Books that are easy to embrace will keep the students attention, and the criteria for this is:

- Simple story
- The story proceeds chronologically
- The story is set in a familiar cultural environment
- The description of the surroundings is explicit
- The collection of characters is limited
- The language is uncomplicated with a lot of dialogue
- The text is large and legible
- There are illustrations to help the interpretation of the story

(My translation 78)

The Catcher in the Rye fulfil all these criteria but two: the criteria about the familiar cultural environment and the illustrations. Since the book is read by student in the English B course there is not really a need for illustrations since I believe that they are old enough to interpret the book mainly through the text. *The Catcher in the Rye* is not set in a familiar environment, but I see this as a challenge rather than a hindrance. This could instead be a starting-point for a discussion about the differences and similarities between the students contemporary environment and the environment that Holden experiences. A visit to other cultural worlds can be made possible through *The Catcher in the Rye* and the students meet people with different cultural backgrounds and as Collie and Slater claims “a reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave behind closed doors” (4).

The early texts that are provided to ESL-learners are often made simpler and quite short. Bo Lundahl argues that it is better to use authentic material since it gives the students a challenge. Authentic material is material that has not been altered or adjusted for students who study English as a second language. Some critics argue that the “adjusted texts are homogeneous and meaningless and it is not always obvious that these alleged simplifications of the language makes a text easier to read” (My translation 61). Authentic material is also emphasised by Collie and Slater who claims that authenticity enhances the students’ vocabulary. They also claim that through the coherent text grammatical features, such as sentence structures and how to connect text, are indirectly practiced (Collie and Slater 5). Further they claim that literature is authentic material in the sense of not being written for a teaching purpose (3). Tricia Hedge also brings this up in her book *Teaching and learning in the English Classroom* where she claims that “if the goal of teaching is to equip students to deal ultimately with the authentic language or the real world, they should be given opportunities to cope with this in the classroom” (67). Therefore, *The Catcher in the Rye* is an excellent book to work with in the English classroom because the book is written in the target language and is not adapted to a classroom for second language learners; ergo the book is authentic material. When the students read the book they will see one type of English since Holden uses a colloquial language, in my opinion something that is worth practicing.

Further, Lundahl argues that books that have been written for the main purpose of providing the students with books in different levels of difficulty have put the language in first position and the subject of the book in second position. Books written for native speakers in English are books that deal with thoughts and feelings; the subject is the favoured focus, which can be applied on *The Catcher in the Rye*

Communicative competence

In this section I will present communicative competence, that is mentioned and thoroughly described in the syllabus for the English B course, and prove that *The Catcher in the Rye* provides an excellent opportunity for the students to practice this. In the section on classroom activity I will show the practical use of the communicative competence while engaging in book talks.

In the syllabus for English for Upper Secondary School we can read that “the subject aims at developing an all-round communicative ability” (skolverket.se) and this is further described in the Structure and nature of the subject:

The different competencies involved in all-round communicative skills have their counterparts in the structure of the subject. Related to these is the ability to master a language's form, i.e. its vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling and grammar. Competence is also developed in forming linguistically coherent utterances, which in terms of their contents and form are progressively adapted to the situation and audience. When their own language ability is not sufficient, pupils need to compensate for this by using strategies, such as reformulating, or using synonyms, questions and body language (skolverket.se)

Communicative competence means having an overall knowledge how to communicate in different contexts, which is to have an adequate language use (Språkboken 11). More simply, as Dell Hymes claims, communicative competence is to know: “when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner” (Språkboken 60). Communicative competence is divided into sub-categories of competences but the explanation found in the quote from the syllabus is sufficient to get a comprehension about the concept.

Since *The Catcher in the Rye* is a very appropriate book to use for book talks, as I will demonstrate in the section on classroom activity, the students will receive an excellent chance to practice their communicative competence.

What does the syllabus say?

In this short section I will show which goals to attain I have chosen to work with and why they are important for *The Catcher in the Rye*. The goals that I will focus on the most are:

To let the students

- be able to discuss in appropriate language, different subjects and keep a discussion going
- be able to actively take part in discussions, and be able to present and deal with the merits of opposing arguments,
- have a basic orientation to English literature from different periods
- have a knowledge of current conditions, history and cultures of the countries where English is spoken
- be able to present aspects of their own culture and country to persons from a different cultural background
- be able to read, summarise and comment on the contents of longer literary texts

The Catcher in the Rye can fulfil all these goals. The third, fourth and fifth goal are automatically dealt with through the book since the story of *The Catcher in the Rye* is set in an English speaking country and pictures the political and social climate in the USA during the 1950's. As such the novel provides the students with an understanding about both the history and culture of the USA which in turn opens for a discussion about both historical and cultural differences between the USA and Sweden. Through classroom activity the other goals will be incorporated through oral and written tasks as I will show in the section on classroom activity. When working from these goals in the classroom the students automatically receive a possibility to practice their communicative competence, something that is supposed to be worked with consistently in the English classroom.

One goal to aim for that I find worthy of raising is the goal that says that student should "improve their ability to read with good understanding literature in English and reflect over texts from different perspectives" (skolverket.se)

Classroom activity

The Catcher in the Rye will be dealt with through a project that spans over eight weeks with the purpose of giving the students the opportunities to reach the goals that I stated in the section on the syllabus, and to practice their communicative competence while working with *The Catcher in the Rye*. This can be applied on what Hedge describes as: Pre-, while-, and post-reading stages.

A pre-reading activity for *The Catcher in the Rye* is to introduce the book by quoting some of the opinions that parents, teacher and politicians had about the book. I will also present the history behind the book and by doing this I think that the students will get curious about reading the book and they will also understand the significance of the book and how Holden can help them with their inner struggles about identity and sexuality. It is very important to entice the students will to read because if they see the book as another hindrance to conquer they will not enjoy the book, or less consider why the protagonist think or reason the way he does. Here the students acquire a chance to practice their communicative competence when they converse and discuss the book.

In the while-reading activities I will encourage the students to think about the issues that I brought up in the section on gender in *The Catcher in the Rye*, and to let them work with these issues in different ways to reach the goals that I stated earlier, and to practice

their communicative competence. I will divide the while-reading activity in oral and writing tasks, and I will use Aidan Chambers' list of "Tell me"-questions that are divided into three different sections: the basic questions, the generic questions and the special questions (My translation 108-111). I mean that *The Catcher in the Rye* is a most suitable book for the "Tell me"-activity designed by Aidan Chambers because it provides the students with ample time to really delve into the issues that I raised in the previous sections, such as why we have prejudices about men and women and why it is difficult for adolescents to enter the adult world. While processing this book the students practice their empathetic skills that I discussed earlier. To use this approach when working with *The Catcher in the Rye* correspond to the goal in the curriculum that states that "as well as being open to different ideas and encouraging their expression, the school shall also emphasise the importance of forming personal standpoints and provide pupils with opportunities for doing this"(skolverket.se).

I will only use the basic and generic questions found in Chambers book because I feel that they are sufficient enough to raise the issues that I feel are important. The basic questions are:

Tell me...

- Was it something in particular that you liked about the book?
 - Was it something that you did not like?
 - Was it something that you did not understand or found difficult? Do you have any questions?
 - Did you notice any patterns or connections?
- (My translation 99)

These questions can be answered by the students in a log-book as homework and thus provides them with the chance on working on their writing skills. Furthermore, through writing an understanding for the text develops because you express yourself in a different manner and everybody is given a chance to make their voice heard (Lundahl 135). At school the students are divided into small groups where they can discuss *The Catcher in the Rye* by using their homework as notes. By doing so, they practice their oral and listening skills as well as their communicative competence. As Birgitta Bommarco claims in her book *Texter i dialog*, when the students were to discuss the *The Catcher in the Rye* they used their notes from their reading logs as a support in the discussion, because the log-book was used as a tool to help them remember their reflections as well as a help to keep the discussion going. I

will work with this method for the first eight chapters which is logic since the story takes another turn then; Holden leaves Pencey Prep after his fight with Stradlater. The book will be divided into chunks of reading homework and will be dealt with in the same way as the previous chapters, and the division will be chapter 9-17; e.g. when Holden has his fight with Sally Hayes, following with chapter 18-26 where e.g. Holden meets Phoebe and Mr Antolini. Hopefully, this way of working with the book will offer the students an opportunity to exchange ideas and explanations that will help them understand the book in a deeper and wider sense. Also, by dividing the book in chunks it is easier for the students to grasp the book. Bommarco claims that when the students wrote down their reflections about the book they were able to “reflect about their own reading and the book as an overall picture” (My translation 79). This is also a perfect example of the students practicing both their writing skills and with that comes grammar practice which is included in the communicative competence.

After reading the book I will move on to the post-reading activities and the general questions found in Chambers book:

- When you saw the book the first time, that is before you read it, what kind of book did you think it was?
 - What do you think now when you have read it, was it as you expected it to be?
 - Did any of the events that took place in the book ever happen to you?
 - Now we have listened to each other and heard all kinds of things that others have noticed. Was it anything at all of what your classmates said that surprised you?
 - When you think about the book, after we have talked so much about it, what is the most important issue for you?
- (My translation 109)

The students will work with the questions in the same manner as when they worked with the elementary questions. I will use the generic questions to lead the students towards a discussion about the issues that I raised in the section on gender in *The Catcher in the Rye* by using the quotes I selected in this section. I feel that the issues that I raised are very important to process, especially since they reflect the statements in the curriculum about taking personal standpoints about ethical issues.

During these four lessons the students will lead the turn of the discussion and I, the teacher, will merely work as a guide through the book. The reason for this is that I do not want the students to try guessing what kind of answers are the “right” answers, i.e. what I

want them to answer, since this is not the aim for these lessons. I want them to discuss how they reason about the issues that Holden brings up. I would like the students to develop their analytic skills and to listen to how they reason, instead of providing them with the answers that the society considers correct. Bo Lundahl argues that all students have different backgrounds and understand texts differently which can create a foundation for motivating discussions. This is called *readers response*, which means that we interpret texts from our own experiences, we use ourselves as references. Since the Swedish classrooms have a tendency to be more and more heterogeneous, one student may understand why Holden reasons one way or another, but another student, who has not experienced a similar situation or a certain culture, may not understand Holden's conduct. As Bommarco claims, the students felt that *The Catcher in the Rye* is a book that "needs to be discussed" (my translation 93) since the students have so different opinions about the book. Further, by discussing the book in class the goal in the syllabus that claims that students should "be able to present aspects of their own culture and country to persons from a different cultural background" (skolverket.se) is fulfilled.

Bo Lundahl argues that in order to actually understand a book we need to process the book, which is something that Bommarco found in her research as well, since the students found *The Catcher in the Rye* more interesting after the book talks she had in her class.

The following lessons will be more controlled since I would like to work with the book on a grass-root level e.g. with the vocabulary. The students learn new vocabulary through the novel and can at the same time think about how Holden uses the words, and from that develop a further discussion on what he really means. Take the word phony e.g. How does Holden use that word and in what context? Why does he use that word? What does it say about him?

As proved, *The Catcher in the Rye* provides both the teacher and the students with a way of dealing with English in both an emotional and language practicing manner. Through the oral discussions and the writing exercises they practice everything that is included in the communicative competence, as well as the goals from the syllabus.

Conclusion

Even if *The Catcher in the Rye* is a short book that really does not have a lot of action in it, it is still full of depths to delve into. At a first glance the protagonist seems to be nothing but an angry young man, but the more you read about Holden and follow his thoughts and encounters, the more you learn about his high morals. Although his opinions are rather conservative the novel can still be used to discuss important subjects such as gender, identity and alienation. The students are introduced to a protagonist that they can identify with, someone who is about to enter the adult world but hesitates because he does not want to meet the dangers of growing up, but at the same time wants to leave childhood behind. The students in Upper Secondary School have to face this problem too and Holden can help them to discuss their thoughts about the difficult questions connected to adult life. Since the book is rather short it is easy to grasp and by using the methods of working with the novel so rigorously the students will learn to appreciate the novel.

The Catcher in the Rye meets many goals in the both the curriculum and the syllabus, which gives the students the opportunity to develop both their language skills and their empathic skills. Through the book talks they will once and for all enunciate their own thoughts instead of guessing what I think which in turn will enhance their confidence. With that being said, I hope that English teachers are convinced that *The Catcher in the Rye* is a novel that can be used to irrigate the students' emotional lives.

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