**THE CATCHER IN THE RYE ESSAY TOPICS**

**Directions:** Thoughtfully write a multi-paragraph essay (900+ words) about one of the topics below. Must be in ink, double-spaced. You are welcome to email it to me, or post it on Google docs for editing. Revision rules apply, and you have the opportunity to revise it, provided I receive it on or before *****. The due date otherwise is *****.

1. Salinger weaves a variety of symbols into The Catcher in the Rye, including (but not limited to) the red hunting hat, the ducks in Central Park, and Allie’s mitt. Select and analyze one symbol that Salinger uses in the book. Explain how Salinger develops this object as a symbol throughout the story. Discuss the symbol’s meaning and significance, and explore its contributions to the overall message of the novel.

2. Throughout the novel, Holden is a tormented adolescent. He feels alienated and isolated at Pency Prep, he is belittled by women he wants to impress, he is beaten up twice, he wants to run away and cut himself off from all other people, and he even considers suicide. Yet, in spite of Holden’s pain, the novel is funny. It really is. Why did Salinger choose humor as the tone for the novel? How does Salinger’s use of humor contribute to the book’s overall meaning and effect? Consider how the book’s overall meaning would be different if Salinger did not use so much humor.

3. Critic David D. Galloway said, “Wherever Holden turns, his craving for truth seems to be frustrated by the phoniness of the world.” Analyze Holden’s use of the word “phony”. What does the word mean in the context of the book, and does Holden offer any alternative to phoniness? Is Holden himself guilty of being a phony? How does Salinger want readers to judge ideas about phoniness?

4. Discuss the meaning or impact of the title of the book as a central, controlling symbol of the story. How does Holden’s wish to be the .catcher in the rye. Help readers understand both his character and the nature of his deep troubles and concerns about life? Be sure to address the significance of Holden’s misreading of the Robert Burns poem.

5. Critic Maxwell Geismar writes, “The Catcher in the Rye protests, to be sure, against both the academic and social conformity of its period. But what does it argue for?” Write an essay to explain what the book argues for. What might Salinger have been trying to communicate to his readers through this novel, and how does he do so?

6. Holden, like each of us, faces living in a world he did not create. Nobody, not even Holden, can live in a culture without having some of it rub off on them. What faults of his society does Holden exhibit? How does Salinger reveal these faults to readers?
THE CATCHER IN THE RYE PROJECT IDEAS

Directions: Choose one of the ideas below or create your own for a project. You may team up with one other person for the completion of the project. Any writing must be in ink, double-spaced. You are welcome to email it to me, or post it on Google docs for editing. The due date otherwise is November 14th.

1. The Mixed Tape: Make a ten song mixed tape or CD for Holden Caulfield, if he were around today. In letter to Holden, explain why you are including each of the ten songs on the mixed tape. Each song should have a paragraph of in-depth description as to why you think he would like it, using evidence you used from the themes, symbols, motifs, and situations that Holden and the novel explored. Requirements: 10 songs (artist/song title) on tape or CD, at least a paragraph explanation for each, use of lyrics to explain rationale, cover for mixed tape.

2. Holden and Gene: Compare The Catcher in the Rye with another novel or poem or piece of literature that describes the loss of innocence and the attainment of maturity. Compare and contrast the protagonist found in it and Holden Caulfield. Explain which piece presents the most convincing picture of growing up. Requirements: Title page, 3 pages, typed, good mechanics.

3. Holden and Depression: Research depression in teenagers, including information about its symptoms and treatment. After doing so, look at Holden. Which symptoms does he exhibit? Use evidence from the story to create a "diagnosis" of Holden. Requirements: Title page, 3 pages, typed, proper documentation, good mechanics.

4. Holden, Ten Years Later: Write a piece of short fiction in which you join Holden's life ten years after the story ends. Try, as best you can, to replicate Holden's unique voice. Write it in the style of The Catcher in the Rye. Try to use what you know of him from the book along with Holden's state of mind throughout the novel to guide your prediction. Requirements: Title page with title, 4 pages minimum, typed.

5. Graphic Novel / Comic Book: This option allows the artistic students to use their skills to recreate the story in a graphic novel (i.e. comic book) format. Choose the most important scenes - in your view - and tell the story of The Catcher in the Rye. The quality of your project will be determined by the following: the extent to which your graphic novel includes the entire story of the novel, the quality / effort put into of the artwork, and the inclusion of an introduction in which you explain what you tried to capture in your recreation of the novel (e.g., "I wanted to emphasize the extent to which they reject society and reveal themselves as rebels in the American spirit. I did this because… and showed it by…").

6. Holden's Scrapbook: Compile a scrapbook of memorabilia that Holden might have collected or come across during the novel. All artifacts must be captioned with where he got it, its significance to him, and the page you found it on. Think of the images that keep recurring in the novel, the places Holden travels to, and anything he collects. This project will be assessed based on the amount of memorabilia collected and its presentation. As a benchmark, expect to get at least ten pieces of memorabilia for your scrapbook.
7. The Secret Goldfish: We hear a brief description of the plot of Holden’s brother D.B.’s story "The Secret Goldfish" early in the novel. Try your hand at short fiction, as you use the details from the description and write a three-page story out of it. Requirements: Title page, 4 pages minimum, typed.

8. Ordinary People and Holden Caulfield: Rent the 1980 Robert Redford film Ordinary People (winner of four Academy Awards, including Best Picture). It is the story of a family struggling to deal with the accidental death of a teenage son. Compare the situations in the film with the situations that occur with the Caulfield’s in The Catcher in the Rye. How much of Holden's behavior has been affected by the death of Ally? Compare and contrast Conrad's grief with that of Holden. Requirements: Title page, 3 pages, typed.

9. Finding Salinger: Interview the author: As we already know, J.D. Salinger is a brilliant recluse who does not often participate in conversations about his life and work. Imagine, however, that somehow you have been granted the first interview with Salinger in decades. He invites you into his home and promises thorough answers to five questions. In your write-up for People magazine, you will want to explain what his house looked like, how he looked when he greeted you, if he had any pets, etc - then, you will write your five questions and their answers. Lastly, you will write a conclusion. This will include your impressions of the author or any interesting facts that you learned from the interview that were not mentioned in your five questions. You could even compare and/or contrast J.D. Salinger to Holden Caulfield in your conclusion. Requirements: Title for article, Introduction, five questions and thorough answers, conclusion.

10. The tool of madmen?: Mini-research project: John Hinkley, who attempted an assassination of Ronald Reagan in 1981, and Mark David Chapman, who murdered John Lennon in 1980, both brought The Catcher to the Rye into the national spotlight. Hinkley told the court that his defense could be found in the novel's pages, while Chapman had asked Lennon to sign his copy of the book earlier in the same day he killed him. Find what you can about both of these instances - how was The Catcher in the Rye involved in each? Requirements: Title page, 3 pages, typed, proper documentation, good mechanics.

11. Censorship and Catcher in the Rye: Mini-research project: Chart the censorship of The Catcher in the Rye since its publishing. What reasons have there been for the challenges the book has faced throughout the years? Requirements: Title page, 3 pages typed, proper documentation, good mechanics.

12. Be the Teacher: You will teach for a 30-minute period in which you lead a discussion on a particular set of themes or some other focused topic as it relates to The Catcher in the Rye. During this 30-minute period, you will prepare and be ready to do the following: facilitate a discussion on selected, important themes; introduce your lesson with some opening remarks; use visual aids - video clips, handouts, posters, and overheads - to help the class think about and understand the ideas you present; and write a brief (about 1 page) follow-up analysis of what you set out to accomplish, how well they/you accomplished this goal, and what you learned from the whole experience.