

Reading Project: Year 5

In our reading project we are going to discuss some of the most famous novels of English and American literature. All the novels in this project require careful reading beyond the plot level. For a full understanding you will have to read between the lines and find the symbolism and allusions of the texts. In order to see these hidden beauties always read with a pencil in your hand and mark any interesting or odd passages in the margin. Discuss your selections in your readers' conferences.

Step 1: Choosing a novel

Visit Amazon.com in the internet and find the five books in our project. Read the brief plot summaries and some readers' comments, then choose the novel that interests you most. You need not order them at Amazon. All of the books are available in Graz.

The Books:

John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*
 George Orwell, *Animal Farm*
 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
 William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*
 J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*
 Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*

Step 2: Getting Started: (Reading Diary)

Read the first chapter of your novel and write a 10-minute entry in your reading diary. Please take your reading diary very seriously. Go beyond the plot level and write about all your thoughts, associations, questions...(Check your handout "What is a reading diary?" for further instructions.) Write a second entry into your reading diary after you have read the first half of your novel, and a third one after finishing.

Your reading diary and your marginal notes in the book will be used as a basis for discussion in your readers' conferences. These notes will also help you remember your reflections later (for Matura preparation for example).

Step 3: Readers' Conferences and Workshop tasks

1. Work in your group and share your reflections and questions. Read each other's diaries and try to answer each other's questions. Ask your teacher for help in case of disagreements or open problems.
2. In each readers' conference choose 10 vocab. items that you would like to remember and write them into your vocab book.
3. Do the workshop tasks carefully and collect all the tasks in a folder.

Step 4: Preparing the Presentation

Choose one or two of the presentation tasks (see separate handout). Distribute the work load evenly among the group members and design an interesting, well-rounded group presentation. Copy your contribution for all the group members + one for your teacher.

Step 5: Presentations

Groups present their novels.

Peer-evaluation and feedback of the presentations + Assessment and feedback from teacher

Step 6: Project Folder

Organize your project folder and hand it in for final assessment. Hand in your reading diary.

Book Presentation

For our final presentations of the reading project choose one of the following tasks. Each student in your group must do a different task. Discuss which of the tasks are most meaningful in connection with your novel. Choose tasks that complement each other so that the class gets a full picture of the main themes, symbolism, background and style of your novel.

- Short biography of the author
- Present an alternative book cover and blurb (and print out all the covers and blurbs available at Amazon.com). Discuss the symbolism of these covers.
- Character portraits of the main characters. (You might want to use the *character profiles* handout. Adding a picture will make your portraits even more realistic.)
- Present the historical and cultural background of your novel. (Use visual aids)
- Write a newspaper article reporting an important incident in your novel.
- Write a poem or song-lyrics that might be used in a film or radio-play of your book.
- Act out a scene of your choice.
- Prepare a "bubble sheet" (A3 poster) where you collect important quotes from your book.
- Identity bags: Bring a bag full of objects that are somehow important to the main character of your book. Show them and explain their relevance.
- Design a board game or quiz to be played in class.
- Choose your favorite scene and imagine how it would be shown in a film. Draw a film storyboard.
- Write a summary of the book (see handout *Literature summary*)
- Find a painting or other work of art that deals with one of the main themes in your book. (Choose a painting that reflects the symbolic and metaphorical level of your book, rather than a painting that shows the setting of your story.)
- Road signs: Identify a few symbolic items in your book and draw them like "road signs". Consider the shapes and colors of road signs and make use of their symbolism. Explain the meaning of the symbol on the back of your sign (50 – 100 words).
- Alternative idea: If you have an idea of your own contact your teacher about it.

Additional ideas for the readers of *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World*

- Present the basic principles of propaganda and advertising (use visual aids)
- Give a propaganda speech about any topic of your choice. Then explain the methods you have used.
- Present to pros and cons of genetic engineering (use visual aids)

The Catcher in the Rye

By J.D. Salinger

I. Reading Diary and Readers' Conference

While reading the novel consider the following questions and take notes into your reading diary.

- 1. What does the title mean? Why does Holden want to be a “catcher in the rye” more than anything else in the world?
- 2. When this book was written, Holden’s attitude and way of speaking was revolutionary. What do you think of him as a character? Do you like or dislike him?
- 3. Holden always describes other people as phony and judgemental. Why is he so obsessed by what is phony and what is real?
- 4. Holden is on a downward spiral. Do you notice his gradual mental breakdown in the course of the book? What are some signs of this breakdown (write down the page numbers)?
- 5. The red hunting cap figures prominently in the novel. Holden keeps taking it on and off and in the end he gives it to his sister Phoebe. What does this gesture mean? Why does he know that Phoebe will like the cap?
- 6. In the past *The Catcher in the Rye* has often been banned from school reading lists. Do you think that highschool students should read it? Why, why not?

In your groups discuss these notes and **add** any interesting or new thoughts that your classmates may have.

II. Character Analysis

Start collecting information about the main characters in the story. Whenever a character appears in the novel, mark the passage so that you are able to “go back” to the character during your group discussions. Keep a separate page for each of the characters so that you can continue to take notes as you continue reading.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holden | <input type="checkbox"/> Stradlater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ms Caulfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ackley |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mr Caulfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Jane |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Phoebe Caulfield | <input type="checkbox"/> Sally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D.B | <input type="checkbox"/> Mr Antolini |

Group Discussion: Compare your notes with the ones of your group-mates and **add** new character traits. When you discuss the characters in the groups, try to justify your opinion about a character in a logical way and by using examples from the book.

III. Themes and Symbols

a) Themes

Themes in literary works are recurring, unifying subjects or ideas that allow us to understand the characters and their world more deeply.

J.D. Salinger has written about quite a number of issues (or themes) in this book. Try to find evidence for the themes mentioned in the table. Write down page numbers and situations.

Theme	Where does it appear?
<p>Innocence (e.g. Phoebe; Jean; "The Catcher in the Rye")</p>	
<p>The Authentic vs The Artificial = Phonies like D.B.... vs the little boy singing the song</p>	

b) Symbols

A literary symbol is something that stands for a significant concept or idea. Sometimes this object is of important value for the characters. Try to explain the meaning of the following symbols and why they are so important for a certain character.

Symbol	What does it mean?
Prep School Life	
The Red Hunting Cap + Allie's Baseball Glove	e.g. Chapters 3, 4, 20, 25
Radio City Music Hall	

3. In your group design a new cover for *The Catcher in the Rye* that contains a symbol from the novel. Write a brief explanation of your piece of art.

IV. The Catcher in the Rye and Censorship in America

The Catcher in the Rye has always been a controversial book. It attacks established values of society, such as school and Salinger made use of frank and profane language. Because of this censorship has been very strict. Many times this book has been banned from the book market and also from school-curricula.

The Catcher in the Rye has been considered "dangerous" because of vulgarity, occultism, violence and sexual content.

It was

banned in Freeport High School, DeFuniak Springs, Florida, 1985.

removed from Issaquah, Washington, optional high school reading list, 1978;

required reading list, Middleville, Michigan, 1979.;

Jackson-Milton school libraries, North Jackson, Ohio, 1980;

Anniston, Alabama, high school libraries, 1982.

challenged by Libby (Montana) High School, 1983.

Research: Read the information on the following web pages then respond to the following situation.

<http://www.euronet.nl/users/los/censorhistory.html> (history of censorship and *The Catcher in the Rye*)

<http://www.jdchandler.com/catcher.htm> (objections to *The Catcher in the Rye*)

<http://www-2.cs.cmu.edu/People/spok/most-banned.html> (most frequently banned books of the 90s)

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/books/banned-books.html> (banned books online)

The Situation: Your school is considering banning *The Catcher in the Rye* from its curriculum. The novel has been a required text in many classes and complaints have started coming in recently from several parents about the language and descriptions of sex in the novel. Make up your mind whether you want to support or oppose banning the book at your school. Write a formal letter to the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) stating whether or not you support the ban of the book. Do not write a purely emotional response but get information to back up your case.

Your Letter: Your letter must have a formal salutation, date and closing. Structure your letter as a 5-paragraph essay.

1. Tell your school's administration what they need to know about censorship in America and challenges to *The Catcher in the Rye* in the past.
2. Discuss the results of banning *The Catcher in the Rye* versus the possible benefits of keeping the novel in the school's curriculum.
3. Be sure to base your argument on information found in the articles and in the statistics listed and NOT on a personal, emotional response.
4. Use a tone and a register appropriate for a persuasive letter to your school's PTA.
5. Organize your ideas in a logical and coherent manner.
6. Indicate any quotes taken directly from a web site by using quotation marks and referring to the title/source of the information.

V. Holden's Journey

Holden tells his story in a series of flashbacks, or digressions. There is nothing logical or orderly about the way a person's memory works, and so Holden's mind drifts in and out of the past, dwelling on memories that often seem to have little relationship to each other. While you're reading *The Catcher in the Rye* it's easy to forget that Holden is telling the story from a hospital bed, and that he's there because of the events he tells us about in the book. In the first paragraph of the novel he says that these events "happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty rundown and had to come out here and take it easy." It isn't until the last chapter of the book that we see another reference to the place where he's recovering. This hospital (or rest home) setting is the overall structure on which the story is built. Within that structure the story itself divides neatly into three parts. Try to identify these three parts:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Within these three sections Holden also has a lot of other experiences. Imagine that you are a private investigator hired by Holden's parents to find out what he did between Saturday afternoon and Monday afternoon. Divide the work in your group so that each of you collects part of the information about Holden's days. Create a □ **"detective log book"** of his experiences and the places he went to. Afterwards □ exchange your information and complete your logbooks.

VI. Vocabulary Work: Slang expressions

J.D. Salinger used a lot of slang expressions in his novel. Identify at least 10 different ones and write them on a list with their appropriate standard English versions.

VI. Rounding off the Novel

Now that you have dealt with this novel very thoroughly, choose **one** of the following tasks as a kind of “closing activity”.

1. Some situations in the novel show Holden in a different light, he is not the “tough” guy that he pretends to be most of the time. Remember Holden on the hill after the disappointing experience with the fencing team; on the sofa in Mr. Antolini’s living room; at the Wicker’s bar with Carl Luce or during his drunken phone call to Sally. Find evidence that describes his state of mind and shows that Holden is very vulnerable in these situations.
2. Write a letter from Holden to another character in the book. He explains his treatment at the hospital and his plans for the fall.
3. Research the historical background (the Fifties) of this novel and then create a female counterpart to Holden. What would she rebel against? In what way would she be like Holden? In what way would she be different? Write her diary entry in which she describes one day of her life. Try to imitate Salinger’s writing style as closely as possible.
4. Describe a school or educational system that Holden would find appealing. Design the school’s official PR leaflet, including pictures,
5. Describe one person – his own age or older – that Holden would enjoy spending time with (They do not necessarily have to be from the Fifties). Imagine that Holden describes her/him to a friend.
6. Imagine Holden as a student at GIBS. What would he say about our school, our teachers, our students. Write his diary after a few weeks at GIBS.