

Using
Bloom's Taxonomy to
Explore Literature

Levels of Understanding



The Catcher in the Rye

By J. D. Salinger

written by Frank Hering



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Introduction to Levels of Understanding

FOR MANY STUDENTS, studying literature is like being lost in an alien universe, filled with hidden symbols, structures, and meanings that only a scholar can uncover. Without a teacher's direction, students lack the skills and confidence to evaluate a work of literature on their own, and instead, will frequently turn to resources such as the Internet for guidance. As a result, they assume another writer's views instead of developing their own.

Levels of Understanding breaks down complex questions students will encounter into smaller parts, showing the steps a critical reader should take in order to develop a sound evaluation of a text. Each section of the guide contains five types of questions representative of Bloom's learning domains—starting with the most basic and foundational skill, knowledge and comprehension, and gradually building to the highest skill, evaluation. All the way, reluctant students are provided with the scaffolding they need to advance from one level of understanding to the next.

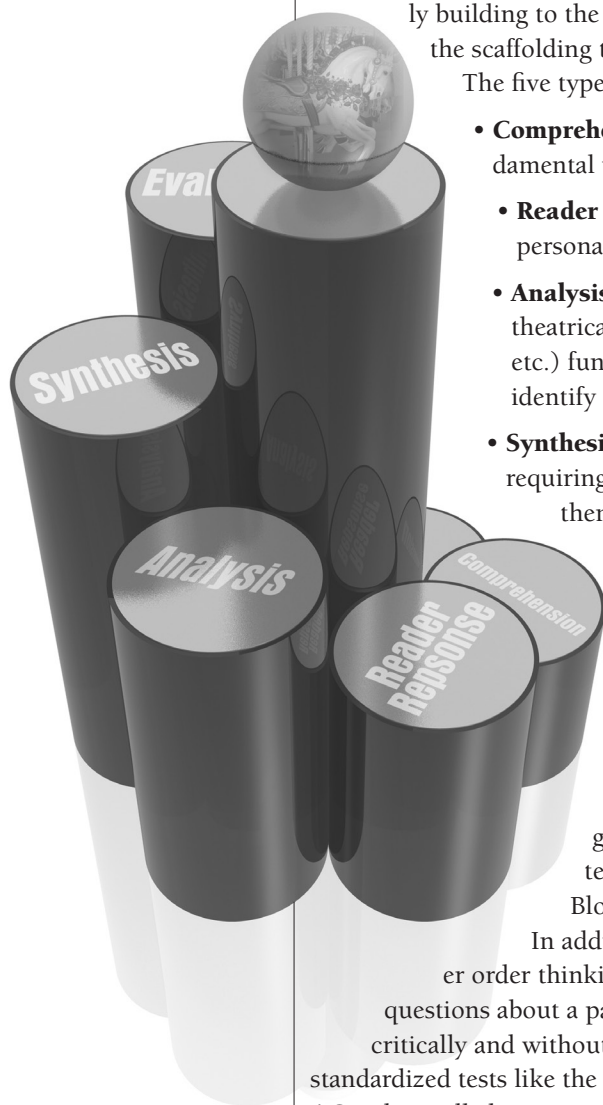
The five types of questions, again, representative of Bloom's domains, are as follows:

- **Comprehension**—will ask the most basic questions to ascertain the students' fundamental understanding of the text: plot facts, character identification, etc.
- **Reader Response**—will ask the students to “respond” to the text by relating it to personal experience or by presenting an opinion on a character or event.
- **Analysis**—will require students to study how various techniques and literary or theatrical devices (diction, symbolism, imagery, metaphors, asides, soliloquies etc.) function in the text. Analysis questions do not ask the student to merely identify or define a literary, theatrical, or rhetorical device.
- **Synthesis**—will bridge the gap between the analysis and evaluation questions, requiring students to look at other scenes in the text and draw conclusions about themes, motifs, or a writer's style. Often, a synthesis question will require the student to draw on prior knowledge—what has been learned in class or through research—and/or information from sources other than the literary title being studied in order to arrive at a satisfactory answer.
- **Evaluation**—will ask the student to make a qualitative judgment on the text and determine whether a particular aspect of it is effective or ineffective.

Other books may list Bloom's taxonomy, define the terms, and offer a general example or two. *Levels of Understanding*, however, provides the teacher with the title-specific questions to allow you to effectively bring Bloom into your classroom.

In addition, unlike other available products that claim to address Bloom's “higher order thinking skills,” *Levels of Understanding* does not teach students how to answer questions about a particular text, but instead, helps them develop skills to evaluate literature critically and without guidance. These are skills that will not only help students prepare for standardized tests like the Advanced Placement Language and Literature exams, the SATs, and the ACTs, but will also give students the self-assurance to develop and articulate a personal view—a skill that will be highly advantageous to them in college.

This product, however, is not geared toward upper-level students only, but is a versatile guide that can be used for students of all ability levels—remedial through honors. The teacher may customize the product to fit the class's objectives and goals, determining which questions the students will answer. Additionally, the guide is entirely reproducible, and each major division begins on a new page, so you may use *Levels of Understanding* for the whole work of literature or only a specific section. 🍷



How to Use this Unit

EACH *LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING: USING BLOOM'S TAXONOMY TO EXPLORE LITERATURE* unit is intended to be a deep and rich component of your literature program, whether your goal is to prepare your students for a large-scale assessment like the AP Literature exam or to challenge your students to read carefully and to think deeply about what they have read.

The questions in this guide are designed to be flexible and meet your needs. They can be used as

- homework questions when students read the text independently.
- in-class reading check questions and “bell-ringer” journal entries.
- class discussion questions and prompts.
- focus questions for pre-writing and essay planning.
- review and study questions for assessment.

While the Teacher's Guide contains an answer key, you will find that the higher-order questions (especially synthesis and evaluation) have model answers that represent more than one possible response. It would be inappropriate to penalize a student whose well-reasoned and supportable answer did not match the “correct” answer in the guide.

For this reason, we strongly recommend that you view the questions in this guide as learning activities and not as assessment activities.

Many of your students are likely to find the higher domains new and perhaps intimidating. Others might be alarmed at having to support their reader-response reactions and their evaluations with an accurate comprehension of the text. The questions in this guide should act as both scaffolding and safety net, guiding your students through a new reading and thinking process and allowing them to practice without fear of “failure.”

The writing prompts, however, provide rich assessment and evaluation opportunities. Every prompt is designed to invite your students to operate in one of the higher order domains, thus giving students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability, and giving you the opportunity to evaluate their progress.

Whether you use *Levels of Understanding: Using Bloom's Taxonomy to Explore Literature* as the core of your literature curriculum or as a supplement, the guide and writing prompts are designed to help your students attain a deep understanding of the works they read. Ideally, they will gain the type of understanding demanded by Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and most state standards, including the Common Core State Standards of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. 🍷



Introduction to *The Catcher in the Rye*

Prep School and Catcher's View of Social Class

HOLDEN BEGINS HIS STORY ON his last day at Pencey Prep, the school from which he has just been dismissed for failing grades. "Pencey Prep is this school that's in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. You probably heard of it," he says. "You've probably seen the ads, anyway. They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hot-shot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere near the place." For Holden, prep schools are "phony" institutions full of "phony" teachers who turn students into "phony" adults.

In the 1940s, the term "prep schools" meant private secondary schools at which students lived in dormitories with their peers rather than returning home at the end of each day. At the time, most Americans saw prep schools as closed circles for the privileged elite. Students were disconnected from society at large and were encouraged to see themselves as part of the "upper crust." Seeing the national unity brought about by the Second World War, starting in 1950, prep-school administrators tried to shun the image of being snobbish bastions of privilege.

Pencey Prep is a fictionalized school. Most critics agree that Salinger drew from his own experiences at Valley Forge Military Academy (though Pencey is not a military school), which he attended from 1934–1936. For his freshman and sophomore years, he attended McBurney School, a private day school not far from his parents' new Park Avenue apartment. Unimpressed with the young Salinger's consistent C's and D's, the administration of McBurney asked him not to return. The author of *In Search of J.D. Salinger* (1986), Ian Hamilton, notes that "Salinger has said that he hated life at military school, but the evidence is contradictory. . . . In fact, his career at Valley Forge is marked by a curiously companionable struggle between eager conformity and sardonic detachment. His co-students tend to remember the sardonic side. "For example, one classmate tells Hamilton, "I was immediately attracted to [Salinger] because of his sophistication and humor. His conversation was frequently laced with sarcasm about others and the silly routines we had to obey and follow at school. . . . Both of us hated the military regime and often wondered why we did not leave the school."

Unlike Holden, however, Salinger returned the next fall and graduated from Valley Forge.

Salinger played with names for Holden's fictionalized prep school, altering the names of The Peddie School and The Pennington School, both of which were real schools on the East Coast, until it became Pencey. Both were among the most elite boarding schools in the U.S. and both promised to create well-rounded young men who would be academically

and developmentally fit for college. According to the 1951 Peddie Prep catalog, "[e]ach boy's ability and achievement [were] tested in conformity with the most modern testing devices, such as those offered by the Educational Records Bureau." Students' development (one is tempted to say their "conformity") was closely monitored in a similar way. The same catalog boasts that the "American Psychological Test is given annually" and that each boy has an adviser whose "interest extends beyond the usual problems of academics and discipline into matters of personality and character."

Prep schools differed from public schools in important ways. In the 1930s, government programs intended to combat the Great Depression introduced widespread vocational education in public secondary schools. Instead of training students for jobs in engineering and industry, prep schools continued to offer classes in philosophy and Latin. In *Catcher*, Holden is uninterested in the kind of practical approach to school employed by Stradlater ("Just as long as it's descriptive as hell") and preached by administrators and teachers ("Life is a game, boy"); instead, Holden writes about what moves him, such as Allie's baseball mitt, and refuses to prepare for future employment, wanting only a job that does not exist. Prep schools also differed from public schools in the kind of interactions boys had with each other. One graduate of a prep school describes the experience with one's teachers and peers as "more powerful. Because the numbers of a class size [were] much smaller than in public schools, you [got] to know everyone more intensely. And it was either 'good powerful' or 'bad powerful.' . . . [Y]ou either liked somebody a lot or you couldn't stand him. There weren't people you just knew casually and could be indifferent about." Readers of *Catcher* see such intensity in the relationships Holden has with Stradlater and Ackley. Similarly, Holden has strong opinions about all his classmates. Because they most show signs of phoniness, he writes them off ("*Sleep tight, ya morons!*"). He and his roommate Mark Cross separate over suitcases, and Holden feels loneliness and regret when the boy is gone. In the incident from prep schools that affects Holden most profoundly, boys torture ("I will not even tell you what they did to him—it's too repulsive") James Castle for making a critical remark about Phil Stabile and James commits suicide rather than take back what he said.

Forced intimacy—requiring students to eat, sleep, and study together—is a hallmark of prep schools. Peter Cookson and Caroline Hodges in *Preparing for Power: America's Elite Boarding Schools* (1985) argue that "since their inception the elite schools have had the responsibility of melting down the refractory material of individualism into the solid metal of elite collectivism. By isolating students from their home world

Levels of Understanding:

Using Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains
to explore J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

Writing Prompts

Chapter 1: Analysis

Re-read the passage starting at the beginning of the chapter and ending with "... He lived on Anthony Wayne Avenue." Write a well-organized and well-supported essay in which you analyze how the setting helps establish such elements as the novel's atmosphere, mood, characterization, and themes. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Chapters 6 – 8: Analysis, Evaluation

Write a well-organized and well-supported essay in which you argue whether Holden is a reliable or an unreliable narrator. Consider what Holden himself admits about his own memory, his lying, his understanding of others, and his sense of self-awareness or lack thereof. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Chapters 9 – 11: Analysis, Synthesis

Write a well-organized and well-supported essay in which you argue whether Salinger uses Holden's interactions with others to criticize society or whether he uses them to reveal the symptoms of Holden's psychological problems. You should consider what Holden wants and needs from a relationship and how he goes about forming connections in Chapters 9–11. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Chapter 12: Analysis, Evaluation

Review the motif of Holden's question about the ducks in the Central Park lagoon, which also appears in Chapters 2 and 9. In a well-organized and well-supported essay, analyze how Salinger uses this motif to address a theme in the novel. You may want to consider whether the particulars of the motif allow Salinger to address the theme in a complex way. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Chapters 13 – 14: Analysis, Evaluation

Parents have called for the banning of *The Catcher in the Rye* based in part on its inclusion of scenes of prostitution. Write a well-reasoned, well-supported essay in which you evaluate whether Salinger needed to include the scenes with Sunny and Maurice. You may want to consider what those scenes contribute to such elements as atmosphere, mood, characterization, and themes and whether Salinger could have accomplished these things in another way. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Chapters 15 – 16: Comprehension, Analysis, Synthesis

Write a well-supported essay in which you compare Holden's encounters with the nuns and with Sally Hayes. How do these encounters challenge Holden's bifurcated way of thinking? Do not merely summarize the plot.

Chapters 17 – 19: Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation

Some commentators argue that nothing much happens in these chapters. Others, however, point out that these chapters narrate Holden's interactions with two key people to whom he reaches out in his loneliness and depression. Consider the role of these characters in the novel's overall story arc and Holden's character arc. Write a well-organized and well-supported essay in which you argue either that these chapters or parts of them should have been cut, on the one hand, or that the interactions narrated in these chapters are essential to the novel. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Chapters 21 – 22: Synthesis, Evaluation

Study Robert Burns's poem "Comin' Thro' the Rye," from which Salinger drew the title of this novel. Then write a well-organized, well-supported essay in which you evaluate the suitability of Salinger's choice. Consider the fact that Holden's fantasy of being the "Catcher in the Rye" is ultimately founded upon a misunderstanding of the poem.

Chapters 23 – 24: Analysis, Synthesis

Compare and contrast Holden's visits with three "teachers": Mr. Spencer, Carl Luce, and Mr. Antolini. Then write a well-organized, well-supported essay in which you identify a theme that all three visits include and trace how a common motif allows Salinger to develop this theme. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Chapter 25: Analysis, Synthesis

Analyze Holden's thoughts while Phoebe is on the merry-go-round, from "After we left the bears ..." to the end of the chapter. Then write a well-organized, well-supported essay in which you argue whether Holden has progressed, regressed, or both since the beginning of the novel. Do not merely summarize the plot.



Levels of Understanding:
*Using Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning Domains
to explore J.D. Salinger's*

The Catcher in the Rye

CHAPTER 1

Comprehension

1. Where is Holden when he is narrating this story? Who is the “you” to whom he is talking?

2. How does Holden feel about his brother D.B.? What does Holden mean when he says D.B. is prostituting himself in Hollywood?

3. What is Holden's situation at the beginning of the story he is telling?

4. What assumptions does Holden make about the person to whom he is addressing his story? How does Holden address those expectations? What can you infer about Holden and his relationship to his audience?

Reader Response

1. How do you feel about the way Salinger has his narrator Holden address his readers in the first paragraph?

2. Do you like or dislike Holden so far?

The Catcher in the Rye

CHAPTER 2

Comprehension

1. What details and circumstances prompt Holden's claims to feel sorry for Mr. Spencer?

2. Do Holden's parents know that he has been expelled from Pencey? When do they expect him home for his Christmas break?

3. What does Holden mean when he criticizes the headmaster of Elkton Hills as "the phoniest bastard [he] ever met in his life"?

4. Does Holden agree or disagree with Mr. Spencer's advice? Does Holden voice his agreement or disagreement to Mr. Spencer or does he keep it to himself?

5. Describe how Mr. Spencer treats Holden and how the teacher acts around his visiting student.

6. How does Holden feel about the way Mr. Spencer treats him? How do you know?

The Catcher in the Rye

CHAPTER 3

Comprehension

1. What two books does Holden say he truly enjoyed? What third book was less exciting to him?

2. What kind of book “really knocks [Holden] out”?

Reader Response

1. What do you think Holden means when he says, “I’m quite illiterate, but I read a lot”?

2. To what extent do you accept Holden’s assessment of himself: “I’m the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life.” ... “I’m quite illiterate, but I read a lot”? Why? Why do you suppose he tends to evaluate himself negatively?

Analysis

1. The plot of the novel, so far, seems to be developing as a series of encounters between Holden and other people. What does Holden’s encounter with Ackley contribute to the plot and to Holden’s character arc?

The Catcher in the Rye

CHAPTER 4

Comprehension

1. What are some of Holden's criticisms of Stradlater?

2. What aspects of Jane Gallagher does Holden fondly recall?

3. What homework assignment does Stradlater ask Holden to do for him? Why does he ask Holden?

Reader Response

1. Are Holden's criticisms of Stradlater justified?

2. Is Holden a good friend and roommate? Why or why not?

The Catcher in the Rye

CHAPTER 5

Comprehension

1. What is the first instance of Holden's enjoying himself?

2. How does Ackley become involved in Holden and the other boy's plan to go to a movie?

3. What crucial information is revealed in this chapter that provides a good deal of insight into Holden's current psychological or emotional state?

4. How is Holden able to recreate the poems on Allie's glove and to describe the glove so vividly in the essay he writes for Stradlater?

5. Given the information provided in this chapter, what year are the events of this story taking place?

Reader Response

1. Given Holden's interactions in this chapter, would you consider him antisocial or misanthropic?
