

Reflective Remembrance and Reinterpretation

Catcher in the Rye is a novel about a boy named Holden Caulfield, a do-no-gooder that gets kicked out of private schools and acts young for his age. He retells the memories of his teenage life from about a year ago, one of which was about the death of his brother Allie.

“Hole” is a short story of a childhood memory about the death of a friend Tal. It is told from many years later in a more reflective mood.

Both stories are told in the past tense. One advantage of this narrative-backstory is its personal connection: the narrator has a vested interest in the topic, a reason to tell the story. More importantly, however, is that this narrative-in-a-memory experience also distorts a different aspect: it eliminates the first impression. It allows for “remember[ing] events that occurred years before more vividly than you could even a day or two after you experienced them (Porter 1). In a story, the calmer representation of a story is the most reliable and meaningful version.

Personal stories are inherently very emotional, but the events that happen would be meaningless and unclear without any future analysis. In “Hole,” for example, the boy narrator’s “mother would hug [him] for no reason, pulling [him] tight against her each time [he] left the house” (Porter 1) simply to comfort him and give him love after Tal’s accident. At that time, when he was young and may not have understood the feeling of loss, the comfort may have felt out of place; relative to the weight of Tal’s death, it may have seemed an unimportant detail. Many years later, the author considers it a detail that warranted including: he fondly remembers his mother’s love, which he later realizes to have greatly helped him through such hard times.

In *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden too tells the story of his brother Allie’s death rather apathetically, and this actually reveals more about the story for a similar reason. Holden goes about his story very objectively at first to fit the prompt to be descriptive. Holden starts by telling that Allie was “left-handed. [He had] poems written all over the fingers and the pockets and everywhere [of the baseball mitt]. In green ink” (Salinger 38). Again, it would not have made sense to think about these random details at the time of Allie’s death, when Holden would have been mourning and driven mad by the loss of his brilliant brother. Now, however, Holden realizes that these little details are what he remembers best of Allie.

Our initial reactions to life-changing events are often dramatic and frightening. They fill the memory with dread. When looking back, however, the sadness often clears to create a clearer. A rendition that not only is happier, but truer to the *essence*, not the ostensible sadness.

Both narrators are able to remember the joy they felt with their friend and brother. They are able to step back from the alluring concept of death and look further to the memory of the *people* that once existed, not the memory itself. For instance, “Hole” includes the author’s reminiscences of the times they were able to “curse and make a lot of noise ... and swim there naked all the time” (Porter 1); he remembers their life as regular boys. In the same way, Holden remembers his brother as the one that “used to laugh so hard at something he thought of at the dinner table that he just about fell off his chair” (Salinger 38). He does not dwell on the fact that he had was “psychoanalyzed and all” (Salinger 39) for the tantrums he threw after the loss, but instead the greatness of a wonderful little brother.

By having the courage to look back and reflect on the painful past, Holden and the boy in “Hole” are both able to get past the veil of sadness, the mask that life had placed on them in their most traumatic moments. When reflecting, some degree of cold indifference to the emotions of the past is *necessary* to become enlightened with truer—and often happier—emotions.