


# Holden with Jonah Complex: A Humanistic Psychoanalysis of *The Catcher in the Rye*

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## Abstract

J.D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1987) explores the inner world of a 16-year-old middle school teenager, Holden Caulfield, during the three days he spends wandering from school to New York City. The anger and anxiety displayed in the protagonist strike a strong chord among young readers. Jonah, a surprising prophet in the Old Testament, refuses to follow God's behest to prophesy in Nineveh and instead flees in the opposite direction. Abraham Maslow, a 20th-century American psychologist, draws inspiration from this narrative and develops the concept known as Jonah Complex, which he defines as the fear of one's own greatness and the evasion of one's own best potential. This article aims to analyze the character of Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* by drawing a comparison to the biblical story of Jonah and incorporating the psychological concept of Jonah Complex. By examining these elements together, it will be argued that Holden Caulfield exhibits symptoms of Jonah Complex, resulting in his fear of growth and his avoidance and disregard for his own prospect. Significantly, this study will draw from Abraham Maslow's theories feasible solutions for addressing Holden's Jonah Complex and ultimately achieving his self-actualization. Meanwhile, the paper will provide for teenagers like Holden with conducive significance as to one's psychological health and personal growth.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Jonah Complex, Self-Actualization, Abraham Maslow, *The Catcher in the Rye*, J.D. Salinger.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

J.D. Salinger's seminal work *The Catcher in the Rye* (1987) intricately delves into the psychological labyrinth of a 16-year-old middle school teenager, Holden Caulfield, who is in the transition between childhood and adulthood, and yet feels disillusioned by the hypocritical, unjust, and phony adult world. In the novel, Holden Caulfield recounts the days after he is expelled from his school, Pencey. After a big fight with his roommate, Stradlater, Holden leaves school two days early and blunders around New York City. This odyssey through the streets of New York unfolds encounters with a spectrum of society – teachers, prostitutes, nuns, his ex-girlfriend, and his sister – culminating in his gradual descent into mental disarray. In the end, he returns home and narrates his story in a medical facility.

Around the 1950s, during which Salinger wrote *The Catcher in the Rye*, the United States retained colossal prosperity, but also suffered from the trauma of World War II. Within this historical context, previous research has often attributed Holden's despair to wartime upheavals. But I consider Holden's problem a general and universal one, and endeavor to interpret it through

the lens of psychology, specifically the Jonah Complex. This exploration seeks to unravel why there is a sense of insignificance and a tendency of evasion from growth resided in Holden and will proffer solutions to empower teenagers like Holden towards enhanced psychological well-being and personal development.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Jonah Complex, which entails a withdrawal from opportunities to achieve and realize one's potentials, finds its theoretical genesis in Abraham Maslow's magnum opus *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1976). Abraham Maslow draws inspiration from the prophet Jonah's reluctant obedience to divine command in the Old Testament's Book of Jonah. In the narrative, the prophet Jonah is summoned by God to Nineveh to prophesy a disaster because of the city's wickedness and depravity. Jonah does not incline to it, and to escape from God, he takes a boat towards the opposite direction. A severe storm hits the ship, and he is thrown overboard. A giant fish designated by God swallows Jonah, and he stays in the fish's belly for three days and nights. Jonah prays for salvation, and God

forgives him and lets the fish vomit him out. Later, Jonah goes to Nineveh and fulfills the prophecy.

There has been much debate as to why Jonah refuses to prophesy and endeavors to flee from God. According to Maslow, Jonah does so because he is afraid to exceed the self-imposed limits, and thus recoils from his innate impulse towards self-actualization. Maslow is convinced that each of us has an inclination to pursue greatness, the possibility of self-actualization, and untapped or unutilized potentials. However, only few of us realize these potentials. One of the reasons is that our fear of greatness outweighs our desire for it. Jonah Complex encapsulates the “fear of one’s own greatness” or the “evasion of one’s destiny” or the “running away from one’s own best talents,” which hinders self-actualization and the realization of personal potential (Maslow, 1976, p. 35). People with Jonah Complex not only bear fear of their own greatness, but also are ambivalent about the greatness of others, and often succumb to jealousy or self-abasement in the face of exemplary figures.

I believe Jonah Complex is thoroughly manifest in *The Catcher in the Rye*, and, as a matter of fact, it is generally dwelt in all of us, mirroring a pervasive human condition. As Janet Howe Gaines (2003) argues, parts of Jonah reside in all of us. In a sense, Jonah becomes everyone: “When we look in our mirror, we may see the reflection of Jonah” (Gaines, 2003, p. 9). Jonah Complex is noticeably universal in literary works, especially in 20th-century literary works (including *The Catcher in the Rye* that this article will focus on). Colin Wilson (1959, p. 17), one of the most prolific writers of the 20th century, holds that modern society is permeated with “the unheroic hypothesis,” which precludes a person from achieving his own greatness. And Wilson further ventilates that 20th-century literary works are dominated by this “sense of defeat, or disaster, or futility,” underscoring the omnipresence of Jonah Complex in literary realms.

While existing clues suggest the logical and valuable application of Jonah Complex to literary analysis, a dearth of systematic and comprehensive research persists in this domain. This lacuna necessitates a scholarly endeavor to bridge the gap, establishing connections between Jonah Complex and literary works. This paper, by employing the Jonah Complex as a lens to interpret Holden Caulfield’s psychological state and extracting viable psychological healing recommendations from Maslow’s theoretical framework, aspires to contribute novel insights and lay the foundation for future scholarly pursuits in this field.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Resemblances between Jonah and Holden

#### 3.1.1 Anti-Hero

Both Jonah and Holden are often regarded as typical anti-hero images. Many critics have expressed

their recognition of Jonah being an anti-hero, or, more specifically, an “anti-Moses,” an “anti-Noah,” an “anti-Elijah” (Kim, 2007, p. 503), or as Jeremiah’s “antitype” (Wolff, 1986, p. 120). Many researchers have found flaws in Jonah that the other prophets lack, such as self-pity, arrogance, self-centeredness, and an excessive focus on self-image. Robert Justin Harkins (2010, pp. 163-168), one of the advocates of the idea of Jonah as an anti-hero, contends that Jonah deviates markedly from the conventional prophet, and is contrasted sharply with figures like Elijah and Elisha, who are renowned for their resolute execution of divine dictates. Elijah, exemplifying bravery and unwavering commitment, contrasts sharply with the timid Jonah, who finds himself ill-prepared in the face of a sudden storm orchestrated by God. Elijah is recorded to have performed many miracles and healings, while Jonah seems indifferent to all the wonders around him. The dichotomy between these prophets underscores Jonah’s atypicality within the prophetic paradigm.

Similarly, Holden is presented as an anti-hero in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Holden, in the opening lines of the novel, claims that he is reluctant to narrate readers “all that David Copperfield kind of crap” (Salinger, 1987, p. 5). And David Copperfield is exactly the typical hero of Bildungsroman or the growing-up novels. Such heroes usually bare a rough childhood and puberty, as David Copperfield with a father dead before his birth, a mother remarried against her will, friendship falling into disingenuousness, loves filled with wrenches and education that can hardly get. Holden obviously is not the such. His family is well-off, and his school Pencey is generally recognized with prestige, but he doesn’t work hard and is often dropped out of schools. Although he frequently reveals his desire to escape from home, his family treats him rather nicely and patiently. Not a single clue in the novel suggests an open conflict between him and his parents. Nevertheless, he feels to be victimized and disadvantaged and even all society is against him. He smokes, drinks, and lives without restraint. He hates teachers, classmates, schools, and everything related to campus life. Unlike David Copperfield, who remains sincere and kind-hearted in the face of adversity and finally wins a promising prospect and enviable love through his own efforts, Holden’s self-abandonment, self-surrender, vulgar language, and idiosyncrasies constitute an anti-hero image in a growing-up novel.

#### 3.1.2 Childish Mind-Set

Both Jonah and Holden exhibit a naive, childish, and unrealistic mind-set. Kassel (2012, p. 414) sees Jonah’s behaviors as akin to “that of a boy in the midst of puberty...recalcitrant, stubborn, egotistical, uncommunicative and lazy.” According to Gaines (2003, p. 38), Jonah is “like a two-year-old child throws a temper tantrum” in chapter one. Similarly, Holden himself admits that “[he acts] quite young for [his] age sometimes” and “[he] was sixteen then, and [he is] seventeen now, and sometimes [he acts] like [he is] about

thirteen” (Salinger, 1987, p. 13). This links Jonah, who lives thousands of years ago, to Holden, a teenager in the 20th century.

The childlike tendencies of Jonah and Holden is mainly reflected in their proclivity to flee from problems rather than dealing with them. As a prophet, Jonah naively believes that he can shun God and his vocation simply by embarking a ship to go somewhere else. Not surprisingly at all, he fails and is trapped in the belly of the big fish for three days and nights. Holden also chooses to escape before throes of growing-up. Facing the complexities of adulthood, he constructs an idealized vision of childhood as a sanctuary from the disillusionment he associates with growing up. In the novel, the only role Holden is willing to take is the “catcher in the rye.” Standing between the rye of childhood and the cliff of adulthood, Holden imagines him as the “catcher in the rye,” who protects the innocence of childhood from the disillusionment that adulthood will inevitably bring. Much of his fantasy is based on the idea that children are simple and innocent, whereas adults are superficial and hypocritical, which reveals that he maintains an idealized view of childhood and a simplified view of adulthood.

Holden sees others through a cynical and simplistic lens, and he himself somewhat realizes that his cynical worldview is unrealistic and problematic, but he is reluctant to explore further. He readily admits that he cannot explain what he means, and even if he can, he does not want to. Holden, unwilling to face his own problems, shields himself with cynical comments and eccentric behaviors. In this case, as a result, he makes the only possible decision - running away. Unable to cope with the world around him, he decides to leave. He would rather retreat to his imagined world rather than dealing with the complexity in reality.

Holden’s impractical solution to social disengagement is to live a simple life in a wilderness hut. He imagines himself working in a gas station, pretending to be deaf and dumb so as to avoid dealing with people. He fantasizes about building a cabin by the woods, living in it self-sufficiently and making his own meals. When he wants to get married, he will find a girl who is also deaf and dumb. Such ideas are undoubtedly impractical. And the consequences of the inability to get rid of such a childish illusion and face up to his own problems will be unbearable.

### 3.1.3 Psychological Disorders

Both Jonah and Holden present more or less psychological disorders in their stories. Many researchers have discerned mental problems in Jonah, including “suicidal desire,” “unaccountable despair and rage” (Zornberg, 2008, p. 274), a “paranoid-schizoid position of isolation” (Salberg, 2008, p. 327), and a propensity for “craving narcissism” (Capps, 1993, p. 153). As for Holden, although the author Salinger never

grants clear clues, throughout the novel, the description of Holden’s mental instability is evident, and readers can easily correlate Holden with depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In the final chapter of the novel, Holden implies that he is narrating his tale in a psychological rehabilitation institution.

Interactions and conversations between Holden and other characters further confirm his psychological disorders. Holden experiences profound psychological distress as a result of the death of his brother, Allie. The night Allie died, Holden slept in the garage and engaged in destructive catharsis by shattering all the windows with his bare hands. His physical wounds heal quickly, but his psychological scar remains. Every time he has to cross a street, he feels as if he will never reach the other side, which leaves Holden with a recurring apprehension. This fear prompts him to engage in a coping mechanism wherein he imagines conversations with his deceased brother, Allie, in order to bolster his courage.

Holden’s actions while dating with Sally also serve as clear indicators of his deteriorating mental state. In his long-winded persuasion over Sally to run away with him and live in a cabin in the wilderness, Sally asks Holden to stop yelling, which Holden claims he does not. It suggests his unawareness of his extreme anxiety and his inability to deal with people in reality. Sally doesn’t appear to be a complicated character, but Holden simply cannot establish contact with her.

## 3.2 Holden with Jonah Complex

### 3.2.1 The Evasion of Growth

Abraham Maslow (1976, p. 35) attributes “the evasion of growth” to Jonah Complex. Such escaping from growing up finds tangible expression in Holden. Holden rebuffs growing up and becoming mature, viewing the adult world through a cynical prism that deems it inherently phony, contrasting it sharply with the perceived purity of childhood. His desire to be the “catcher in the rye” is a transparent reflection of his fear of growing up and his unrealistic hope that all children can avoid adulthood.

In the novel, Holden often depicts the adult world as full of rules and conventions that will turn people into phonies. “Phoniness” is probably the most famous word in *The Catcher in the Rye* and one of Holden’s frequent uses. This term is a summation of the superficiality, hypocrisy, pretense, and affectation he encounters in the world around him. Holden’s judgements, though simplistic, does make sense. In many ways, he is an insightful observer. Throughout the novel, he meets countless pretentious, affected, hypocritical and superficial characters. But on a deeper level, what his relentlessly fierce criticism of adults conceals is his resistance to growing up. This resistance is distinct in Holden’s aborted sexual encounters. Although Holden frequently thinks and talks about sex,

all his contacts with women in the book are disastrous. In particular, his interaction with Sonny, a prostitute, is the best illustration of this problem. Curious about sexual experience, Holden pays a prostitute, but ends up unable to have sex with her. Furthermore, when he sees the red “fuck you” written on the wall of Phoebe’s school, he is driven to be “damn near crazy” and erases the writing from the wall (Salinger, 1987, p. 207). For him, sex is adult and dirty, and he’s afraid of the adult world will contaminate and invade the purity of childhood. In a narrow sense, this presents Holden’s confusion about sex. More generally, it also indicates Holden’s resistance to growth.

Holden’s evasion of growth is also demonstrated in his inability to embrace changes. He feels pleasantly secure due to certainty and is full of angst of future uncertainty. When he refers to his several school shifts, he voices that he doesn’t care much whether he is sad about leaving, and only hopes that he will “know” when he leaves. Holden’s fondness for the museum also betrays his fear of dealing with changes. “The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody’d move... Nobody’d be different” (Salinger, 1987, p. 127). The museum showcases him a picture of life that he can grasp: it is stock-still, silent, and immutable. Holden reckons that it represents a simple, idealistic, and controllable vision of life. He dreams that his own life will be as uncomplicated and changeless as those museum exhibits. But the realization of this mirage is unworkable, for no one can stop time. As Maslow (1976, p. 257) warns, “you can’t ‘undo’ knowledge, you can’t really become innocent again; ... you can’t really regress, not even by giving up your sanity or strength altogether.” Maslow’s cautionary note resonates profoundly in Holden’s futile quest for an unchanging existence.

### 3.2.2 Fear of One’s Own Greatness

Abraham Maslow is convinced that all of us has a longing for greatness, an impulse to realize more potentials and to self-actualization. But many people end up mediocre. There are many reasons, one of which, according to Maslow, is their fear of greatness exceeds their desire for it. The “fear of one’s own greatness” can also be called the “evasion of one’s destiny” or the “running away from one’s own best talents.” People with Jonah Complex tend to evade their growth, set low-level ambitions, and shy away from their own talents and potentials. They often “run away from the responsibilities dictated (or rather suggested) by nature, by fate, even sometimes by accident,” just as Jonah tries to escape fate (Maslow, 1976, p. 35). Maslow illustrates this “fear of one’s own greatness” with an easy-to-understand example. Maslow raises that if a person initially thinks that he will become a great philosopher like Plato, he will sooner or later be struck down by his grandiosity and arrogance. He will think it is but a crazy pipe dream and delusion. He fears the potential failure

and the accompanying ridicule. As a result, he denies his abilities, forgoes the realization of his talents, and ensconces himself among the average.

This “fear of one’s own greatness” is bespoken in Holden. Holden must have his own dream like every young man. But when Holden narrates his story, he believes he is doomed to achieve nothing and have no prospect. When Mr. Spencer asks Holden whether he cares about his future, Holden first replies that of course he does, but after a minute he changes his tune and says he doesn’t care much. His father wants him to go to Yale or Princeton, but he asserts never to enter any of the Ivy League colleges. Even Sally’s mother said he “had no direction in life” (Salinger, 1987, p. 63). His disinterest in academic achievement, dismissal of Ivy League prospects, and skepticism towards his own abilities underscore a self-imposed mediocrity stemming from the fear of potential failure and ridicule.

Holden not only has no assumption about his future, but he also degrades his abilities and neglects his talents. For example, he reckons he is the dumbest in the family - his brother D. B. is a capable writer, his dead brother Allie is depicted as a clever spirit, and even his little sister Phoebe always gets straight A in every class. During a conversation with Holden, Mr. Antolini has instructed Holden that he is not alone in feeling bewildered, frightened, or even disgusted by human behaviors and there are many people who have been at a loss once. A fortunate few do record their thoughts and confusions in writing, which allows them to pass them on from one generation to the next. Mr. Antolini suggests that Holden should follow their examples by channeling his experiences into writing. As a matter of fact, Holden possesses a notable aptitude for writing; nonetheless, he is completely uninterested in Mr. Antolini’s teaching and never think of making full use of his talents to attain accomplishments.

Holden has been oscillating between his desire for greatness and his fear of it. Holden, at the bottom of heart, is longing for success, prominence, and being noticed and praised, but he dares not make any efforts and actions. His favorite red hat symbolizes his individuality and creativity. However, he often avoids wearing this hat in public, showing that he is afraid of being condemned for his true self. He is even careful not to “get boisterous or anything” when he is drinking, because he doesn’t want anyone to notice him (Salinger, 1987, p. 156). However, he dances while Stradlater shaves, and admits that he himself is an “exhibitionist” who wants an audience badly (Salinger, 1987, p. 33). His carefully curated public persona, avoiding the conspicuous red hat and tempering his behavior in social settings all indicate that there is a yearning as well as fear hidden in Holden for greatness and attention.



### 3.2.3 Hostile Feelings toward Sainly Men

According to Abraham Maslow, a person with Jonah Complex not only has a fear of his own best possibility and a longing for it, but also possesses an ambivalent attitude towards the greatness of others. As Maslow suggests, we certainly like and admire all those who exemplify truth, kindness, beauty, justice, perfection, and ultimate success. However, diving into the depths of human nature, we will become aware of our complex and often hostile attitudes toward “sainly men” (Maslow, 1976, p. 36). They make us uneasy, anxious, confused, jealous, and somewhat self-abased. For, great people, whether or not they intend to do so, simply because of their existence and their nature, make us aware of our smallness.

While *The Catcher in the Rye* may not explicitly portray “sainly men,” Holden’s envy and even jealousy of some characters is palpable. He is often relentless in his fierce and cynical attacks on outstanding persons. One of the objects of his jealousy is his charismatic roommate, Ward Stradlater. Stradlater is a friendly lad, but for Holden, he is “a phony kind of friendly” (Salinger, 1987, p. 29). Stradlater is always running around with his bare torso in the dorm, a behavior that Holden interprets as an attempt to show off his massive physique. Stradlater enjoyed an endearing good look, but Holden was reluctant to praise it, commenting only in a derogatory way that “he was mostly a Year Book kind of handsome guy” (Salinger, 1987, p. 31). Holden’s sarcastic remarks are indicative of his antagonistic attitude towards the achievements and excellence of others.

## 3.3 Solutions to Holden’s Jonah Complex

### 3.3.1 Unitive Consciousness

Abraham Maslow not only analyses the Jonah Complex, a psychological state that impedes people’s self-actualization, but also gives solutions to achieve self-actualization in his works. Some of these methods are of tremendous conductive significance to the young as Holden. For example, Maslow (1976, p. 115) stresses that wise, mature, and self-actualized men enjoy “Unitive Consciousness,” namely, to “be aware of the B-realm while immersed in the D-realm.” For Maslow, the B-realm (the realm of being) entails the sacred, the infinite, and the holy; and D-realm (the realm of deficiency) contains the earthly, the transient and the profane. Although most people prefer B-realms, Maslow cautions that both are crucial to a healthy life, because the process of self-actualization inevitably involves sufferings and struggles. And self-actualizers - mentally healthy people – are able to put these two worlds together and live comfortably in both realms.

As a matter of fact, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, the image of “ducks” also symbolizes the Unitive Consciousness in some sense. Holden is fascinated by the ducks in the Lagoon of Central Park. He repeatedly referred to that “[he] was wondering where the ducks

went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over” (Salinger, 1987, p. 17). The ducks, enduring the icy embrace of winter, become a metaphor for survival in adversity. The death of his brother Allie traumatizes Holden and makes him acutely aware of the fragility of life. And the phony adult world seems to him so overwhelming and suffocating that he cannot bring himself up together. Here Holden himself becomes the ducks experiencing the biting winter of his life. By asking ad nauseam where the ducks go in winter, Holden is endeavoring to find a way out of his own afflictive plight. However, winter does not freeze everything. The ducks disappear every winter, but return every spring, thus symbolizing that there is still hope of the B-realm while being enshrouded in the D-realm.

In addition, the pond itself inhabited by ducks assumes metaphorical significance in Holden’s eyes, because it is “partly frozen and partly not frozen” (Salinger, 1987, pp. 160-161). The pond is between two states, just like Holden is between childhood and adulthood. Childhood, for Holden, is his B-realm, and adulthood, D-realm. Holden’s psychological turmoil, stemming from an ardent yearning for the sacred B-realm and a categorical denial of the profane D-realm, necessitates a reconciliation of the two. In order to get rid of Jonah Complex, Holden must succeed in dealing with these two realms, and as suggested by Maslow (1976, p. 115), be able to see perfection through or in defects, to see “the eternal in and through the temporal and momentary.”

### 3.3.2 To Embrace, Lovingly, One’s Own Destiny

For Abraham Maslow, Jonah’s primary problem is to escape the destiny that might achieve his own greatness. Therefore, Maslow (1976, p. 274) advises us “to embrace, lovingly, one’s own destiny.” Maslow’s notion of destiny is not in the religious sense, but more similar to the mission or purpose of life. Maslow (1976, p. 192) asserts, “all self-actualized people have a cause they believe in, a vocation they are devoted to.” Maslow believes that one must find out his true desires and true nature and be able to live in a way that express them. In this way, he would make sense of what he is naturally fit to do, what is suitable for him to do, or even what he is born to do. Such a “cause,” “vocation,” or “mission” become Maslow’s idea of destiny.

Obviously, Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye* has not yet discovered and is unwilling to discover his own destiny. There are many references to his aimlessness of life in the novel. His teacher, Mr. Spencer and Mr. Antolini both ask Holden about his plans for the future, which are all met with indifference, reflecting Holden’s disinterest in delineating a meaningful trajectory for his life. In fact, much of his sense of loss, confusion, and pain stem from a lack of mission in life. Holden’s story echoes Maslow’s claim that lacking a life purpose can lead to feelings of loss and bewilderment.

Finding the mission of life is not achieved overnight. For teenagers, uncertainty and confusion about the future are understandable. Maslow instructs us that self-actualization is an ongoing process and advises that we regard life as a series of choices, one after another. One, each day, makes some choices of growth rather than that of fear; takes responsibility rather than avoiding it. Slowly, he will know what his destiny is and what his cause in life will be.

Maslow recognizes the role of a good education in self-discovery. He conceives that the primary goal of an ideal education is to allow students to discover themselves, and consequently their vocation and destiny. This coincides with the advice of Holden's teacher Mr. Antolini. Although it is not definite whether he makes homosexual advances to Holden, his concern for Holden is sincere and distinct. Mr. Antolini assumes that Holden will one day fathom out where he wants to go and what his purpose in life is, and that his first step should be to study hard at school. Because Mr. Antolini believes that, with a certain level of education, a man will discover the "true measurements" of his mind and what is suitable for it while what is not (Salinger, 1987, p. 197).

Judging from the novel, the most suitable vocation for Holden is presumably writing. Holden is, by many ways, a keen observer, who can often pick up on details and draw insightful perceptions. And he is indeed talented in writing. Despite his disapproval of Mr. Antolini's suggestion at the time, Holden eventually turns his experience into storytelling. And unexpectedly, Holden confesses that "[he] sort of [misses] everybody [he tells] about" while narrating his story (Salinger, 1987, p. 220), which draws sharp contrast with his initial malicious remarks on almost everyone and his inability to establish emotional connection with others before. Perhaps this is a sign that he begins to discover his vocation and destiny. In storytelling, Holden's narrative, as it unfolds, portrays the gradual emergence of his ideal vocation, symbolizing a potential antidote to his Jonah Complex.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Great or not, people are unlikely willing to waste their lives and achieve nothing. The collective human journey manifests as an unceasing pursuit of purpose and meaning, an endeavor intricately interwoven with the profound yearning for self-actualization. As Maslow indicates, everyone, even Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye*, who aimlessly loiters all day long, has an impulse to improve himself, an impulse to live a significant and full life. But many of us

chose to flee from the best possibilities and become mediocre.

The Jonah Complex, far from an isolated affliction peculiar to Holden, assumes the mantle of a pervasive and ubiquitous challenge confronting not only teenagers navigating life's meaning but also adults ensnared in the quagmire of mediocrity. Therefore, unveiling the underpinnings of this predilection towards mediocrity emerges as the crux in surmounting the Jonah Complex and fostering a life conducive to psychological well-being and personal growth. Through the analysis of Holden's mind-set combined with Maslow's wisdom, it is important to realize that evasion will never solve the problem. The imperative lies in confronting the self, unraveling the intricacies of our authentic nature and desires, and embracing latent potentials in their entirety. Only through this unwavering confrontation with the self can the mission of life unfurl, transcending obscurity to emerge as a luminous beacon guiding the path we choose to take. In this revelatory synthesis, the nexus between understanding Holden's plight and internalizing Maslow's wisdom unveils a transformative paradigm wherein evasion dissipates, giving way to an earnest journey towards self-discovery and actualization.

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