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Why Was Holden Caulfield Happy to Go to the Museum of Natural History?

The symbolism of the Catcher in the Rye can be found in the tiniest of details. The fondness of the character of Holden Caulfield for the Museum of Natural History is no exception. To derive the true meaning of this episode, we need to study the psychology of this character in its entirety. Holden Caulfield is clinging to the past and is not ready to grow up. And that's why the museum where the past is preserved speaks to him.

Holden explains his fondness of the museum because nothing changed there. "The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was" (Salinger 157) He starts by listing and describing the exhibits. But what is actually important is his following thoughts on how these exhibits make him feel. Calmness and stability are the things he seeks each time he enters the Museum of Natural History. He thinks back to the time when he used to visit it with his teachers. He recalls their school trips in a lot of detail. He seems to be finding comfort in knowing that there are constants in this world. And that's why he puts an emphasis on how he feels when he looks through the glass cases of museum exhibits. They help him anchor his mind. Give him something to return. Something that stays the same even when everything around him succumbs to change. And this reassurance is the source of his love for the museum.

Holden is painfully aware of the changes that happen around him. And, more importantly, the changes that occur to himself. He feels that he's becoming different and that he won't ever be



able to return to the past; he states “The only thing that would be different would be *you* [sic]” (Salinger 158). It’s not necessarily his age that is the issue. He sees the dreaded change in every little thing. Like a different overcoat, a different person beside him. This causes him a great deal of distress. In this sense, a museum is a sort of escape from the reality of an outside world. A place where he can hide. This aversion to changes that happen outside of glass cases seems to be what pushed him to become fond of the Museum of Natural History. It’s not only the happiness of seeing something pleasant and familiar. It’s also the happiness of getting away from everything he is so anxious about. If only for a moment.

Holden Caulfield’s feelings about the trip to the museum become evident when examined through the prism of the rest of the *Catcher in the Rye* book. His tumultuous path to adulthood and his nostalgia for things that can never be the same all find their reflection in this short but telling episode. He does not want to let go of the past. He is afraid of growing up. And he needs something to hold on to.

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Work Cited

Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher In The Rye*. Little, Brown, 2019.

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