

Name _____



The Real and the Fake

Holden Caulfield had a big problem with “phoniness.” To him, it seemed like almost everyone in the world was fake. They pretended to be something they weren’t, and that made him angry. He hated when adults put on a big show to impress others. He didn’t like how kids at his fancy school bragged about money or good grades. It all felt dishonest,

like people were wearing masks instead of being their true selves.

Holden himself, though, wasn’t sure who he really was. He wanted to be different from the phonies, but sometimes he acted fake, too. He would lie to strangers about his name or where he was going. He’d pretend to be older or more important than he really was. Deep down, he didn’t like that about himself. It made him feel lonely, like no one could really understand him.

One time, Holden met a boy named Ernest’s mother on a train. He told her how great her son was, even though he actually didn’t like the boy at all. He made up a whole story about how Ernest was one of the most popular kids at school. Holden knew it wasn’t true, but he thought it would make the mother feel happy. Was that being fake, or was that just being kind? Holden didn’t know.

Holden also had a younger sister named Phoebe. She was one of the only people he truly admired. She was honest and said exactly what she felt. She didn’t pretend to be someone she wasn’t. When Holden told her how much he hated phonies, she asked him if he ever liked anything at all. That question made Holden think. Maybe he spent so much time worrying about fake people that he forgot to enjoy the good things in life.

By the end of his story, Holden wasn’t sure if he had all the answers. He still saw phoniness everywhere, but he also realized that nobody is perfect—not even himself. Maybe people wear masks sometimes because they’re scared or don’t want to feel alone. And maybe figuring out who you really are is a lot harder than it seems.