Essay #1

**Literary Analysis Essay – *Catcher in the Rye***

Often when people are in a crisis, they will reach out to the very people whom they know will tell them what they don't want to hear, but what they need to hear. A teenager, for example, might share a problem with her parents, then she will argue with them about the advice given, all the while knowing they are right. In most cases, that teenager knows what her parents are going to say and she just needed to hear them say it. In J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, the protagonist Holden is no different than most teenagers. While Holden reaches out to an eclectic mix of other characters in the book, he chooses to contact both Phoebe and Carl Luce because they will force him to accept what he already knows: that growing up cannot be halted, and that he will survive the next part of his life.

Holden's contacts with his sister Phoebe present a role reversal where she's the older and wiser sibling, but Holden knows this and reaches out to her in order to have what he already knows about the inevitability of growing up be validated. When Holden is visiting Phoebe at their home and tells Phoebe of his plans to roam New York for a few days and avoid telling his parents he has been expelled, Phoebe takes on the role of the older sibling first when their mother comes into Phoebe's room and smells a cigarette Holden had recently extinguished. To protect Holden, who is hiding in the room, Phoebe takes the blame for the cigarette without pause knowing her mother will be angry with her. Many younger siblings take any opportunity to “tattle” on their older siblings and get them in trouble, but Phoebe protects Holden as if he is the younger of the two. Phoebe then offers Holden all of her Christmas present savings. Even when Holden doesn't want
to accept it, Phoebe insists she can lend him “some,” (179). Typically, a child of only ten-years-old wouldn't think to lend all of her money. Phoebe, however, is very rational and sees no other alternative than giving it to her older brother, illustrating a maturity level usually possessed by an older sibling. In going to visit Phoebe, and later leaving her a letter saying he is leaving, Holden knows that Phoebe is going to show him the lunacy of what he is doing. Early in the book, Holden mentions that “you never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your whole life” (67) about Phoebe. He also wants to call Phoebe before he goes to the Lavender Room because he wants to talk to someone who he knows “has sense and all,” (66). Ultimately, Phoebe is one of the smartest people he knows, and she tells him when he is wrong. One could argue that leaving Phoebe a letter to come meet him before he plans to go out west is simply a plan to say goodbye to her; however, the vagueness of the letter, the immediacy of Holden's intentions that were sure to alarm Phoebe, and Holden's knowledge that Phoebe is “very emotional, for a child,” (68) and that she's very affectionate, (161), makes that argument indicate that Holden was actually acting cruelly because he knew it would tear Phoebe apart; but the way Holden talks of Phoebe proves he would never intend to do that to her. In having her come to meet him, and Phoebe insisting she go out west with him when they have only have eight dollars between them proves to Holden what he already knew, and what he needed Phoebe to tell him: that what he is doing is immature and he needs to grow up and begin making decisions an older sibling makes. Holden knew what he was doing when he met with Phoebe. Moreover, as he was leaving his house the night before, he admitted if his parents had caught him, he wouldn't have cared and that he “almost wished they did,” (180) illustrating again how in reaching out to Phoebe, he was hoping for someone to
stop him. Other characters Holden reached out to offered him advice he knew he needed to hear as well.

Though Holden says his address book has just a few names, in reaching out to Luce, he chooses someone whom he knows will challenge him to grow up and seek psychiatric help. When Holden calls Luce, he mentions how he “didn’t like him too much” (136). Even though Holden and Luce were never really friends, Holden still chooses him to have a drink with. Clearly Holden isn't seeking friendship but believes that Luce has something of value to provide through conversation. Holden explains how intellectual Luce is, and how he “had the highest I.Q. of any boy” (136) at his old school. When Luce first arrives at the Wicker Bar, Holden again reiterates the fact that Luce is “a pretty intelligent guy” (143). Just like Phoebe, Holden knows that Luce will tell Holden what he needs, and wants, to hear because he is so smart. The first thing Luce says to Holden after Holden greets him by mocking a gay man he sees, is “when are you going to grow up?” (144). While Holden acted as if he wanted to see Luce just to catch up, it is evident that it was really another attempt to have someone validate for him the fact that he needs help. Furthermore, Luce asks Holden if he remembers what he told him the last time they talked and Holden explains that Luce's father is a psychoanalyst and Luce had once told Holden that he needed to see a psychoanalyst. Holden not only chooses to meet with someone who once told him he needed actual psychiatric help, but he also revisits the matter with a sense of curiosity when he asks Luce if he visited his father and “had him psychoanalyze [Holden] and all” (148), wondering what he would do to Holden. Ultimately, Holden calls Luce to hear again that he needs help.

As the interactions with Phoebe and Carl Luce force Holden to allow his
understanding of the inevitability of growing up to come to the surface, Holden is able to begin healing so he can move on with his life. Before Holden talks to Luce, he notes that “he was very enlightening sometimes” (136), indicating Holden is hoping beforehand that talking to Luce will “enlighten” him and let him know it is okay, and necessary, for him to grow up. While Holden is watching Phoebe on the carousel, she unknowingly triggers a realization in Holden as well. Holden becomes mesmerized with watching Phoebe on the carousel, how “she kept going around and around” (213). Holden has realized he is the adult watching the child on the carousel, and he “felt so damn happy all of a sudden” (213) and even though he is getting soaked by the rain he doesn't care. Holden is accepting that bad things will happen, but he isn't going to let them stunt his growing process. The explosion of emotions happening within Holden that he reveals by saying he “was damn near bawling” (213) illustrate that Holden has begun to heal and that he knows that he is ready to become an adult, and that he will be okay, as will Phoebe. By revealing that he “got sick” (213) and the fact that he is telling his story to a therapist at a mental hospital prove that the interactions with Luce and Phoebe allow him to set himself free and get the help he needs to grow up. Luce and Phoebe were chosen for a reason; while it might have been subconsciously, he needed them to tell him once again that it is time to become an adult.

Every teenager has a time when he or she knows something big and new is coming, but many try so hard to avoid it. Whether it be procrastinating in starting a big school project, or struggling with the idea of adulthood, it is not uncommon for teens to seek out someone who will tell them what they already know: the work cannot be avoided. Many teenagers can relate to Holden's fears of growing up, and even more so to
the biggest fear of all: it can't be stopped. Eventually all people have to allow themselves to run straight off the “rye field,” even if it means someone is pushing them, because they won't know what is in the abyss until they fall.

Essay #2

Rhetorical Analysis Essay The Great Influenza

*The Great Influenza*, a book by John M. Barry, was written in light of the 1918 Influenza epidemic. Barry writes about scientists and their research to a general audience of concerned and frustrated citizens, explaining how challenging their work really is. Barry claims that scientific research is a tedious task, in which one must embrace uncertainty and have the courage to push forward into the unknown. Barry adopts an informative yet informal tone, using ethical appeals, a forest metaphor, and a literary allusion to praise the scientific process and those bold and ambitious enough to partake in it.

Early in the passage, Barry establishes that good scientists must embrace uncertainty, which he effectively does through quoting famous scientists. Barry’s ability to readily quote scientific pioneers suggests that he is an insider, or at least is familiar and well read in the field of science. He writes, “For as Claude Bernard, the great French physiologist of the 19th century, said ‘science teaches us to doubt,’” and continues “Just as Albert Einstein refused to accept his own theory until his predictions were tested.” These references to noted scientists from Barry not only highlight his expertise in the field of science, but also support his argument that scientists must be comfortable with not knowing. As a result of Barry’s references to great and respected scientists, Barry’s readers are more likely to trust his argument that scientists must be brave, accept
failure, and deserve to be respected for their work even when their conclusions are uncertain. As the piece continues, Barry advances in establishing scientific uncertainty through the use of a wilderness metaphor for scientific experimentation.

Late in the second paragraph, Barry creates a forest metaphor for science to suggest that making discoveries is as challenging as taming a wilderness. He claims that scientific exploration is like being stranded with nothing but ingenuity to survive. Barry explains that great scientists “move deep into a wilderness region … where the very tools … to bring order to it do not exist.” By comparing research to a wilderness, Barry creates a tangible example for readers of his essay. This allows his audience to form a basic understanding of the complexities of what scientists do. His approach here is effective because most people have had experience with forests, whereas many do not have experience with laboratories. Once the reader has a basic understanding of what scientists do, he explores the “how” continuing the same forest metaphor. In the third paragraph Barry asks, “would a pick be best, or would dynamite be better- or would dynamite be too indiscriminately destructive?” By posing scientific techniques and the questions they must ask in a more understandable way, Barry cultivates an appreciation for scientific work in his audience. When Barry explains these complex considerations that scientists must make in their research, readers likely consider their own thought processes and realize what great societal contributors scientists are when they persevere. This is especially important given that there would have been much criticism of scientists after the 1918 Influenza epidemic took so many lives. Through this metaphor, Barry is able to elevate scientists and researchers to the level of explorers – brave and highly respected men and women, venturing off into the unknown for the
selfless purpose of helping humanity. This metaphor creates imagery in Barry’s writing, allowing readers to appreciate the work that scientists do.

Barry adds to his argument by alluding to the story of *Alice in Wonderland* and using varying sentence structure, appealing to readers’ emotions about the need for scientists to continue their work even in the face of uncertainty. In the second paragraph, Barry claims, “There they can probe in a disciplined way. There a single step can take them through the looking glass into a world that seems entirely different, and if they are at least partly correct in their probing acts like crystal to precipitate an order out of chaos to create form, structure, and direction.” These two sentences create a feeling of climax, building to something big – “form, structure, and direction” – similarly to how a scientist would feel moving towards an important discovery. However, Barry quickly concludes this idea with “A single step can also take one off a cliff.” This simple sentence sobers the reader’s building excitement, leaving him with a sense of profound disappointment, as often experienced by scientists when an experiment fails to yield the desired result. Scientists feel that failure over and over again, yet continue to “go through the looking glass,” and readers now understand this. Barry is illustrating that scientists deserve respect for their difficult work.

Barry makes a strong argument in favor of the field of science in general, likely in response to criticism of scientists after the Influenza epidemic. He writes to everyone, professional or common, explaining that science is incredibly tedious and immensely difficult. Even in today’s society, with the recent Ebola outbreak, scientists have been the subject of much scathing criticism. Researchers are criticized for taking too long to find cures, medicine is blamed for ineffective vaccines, and physicians are accused of
prescribing drugs solely for a profit. Barry’s message still rings true, almost one hundred years after the 1918 Influenza epidemic. Not everyone has the mental capacity or patience to be involved in “the wilderness” that is scientific research, and those who do deserve our respect and admiration.