

Name:
US Lit - Cahill

Understanding the Unreliable Narrator

For the following quotes, describe what Holden seems to want you to think about him (or what kind of image he is trying to present) and what you can guess or know is the truth. You may be able to see through his story, or his actions may indicate he isn't being totally honest (remember, actions speak louder than words).

1. "Only, we didn't have the meet. I left all the foils and equipment and stuff on the goddam subway. It wasn't all my fault. I had to keep getting up to look at this map, so we would know where to get off. . . . The whole team ostracized me the whole way back on the train. It was pretty funny, in a way." (p 3)

Holden would like us to think that he is really indifferent to the whole incident with the foils, especially since he argues that it wasn't really his fault. In reality, the entire trip was a waste because of him, and it doesn't really make sense that checking the map would make him forget the equipment. The team was very aware of this as well, since they didn't speak to him the whole trip back. Holden must be feeling rather alienated and guilty now, and is trying to cover it up, as is his habit.

2. "He put my goddam paper down and then looked at me as if he had just beaten the hell out of me in ping-pong or something. I don't think I will ever forgive him for reading that crap out loud. I wouldn't have read it out loud to *him* if *he'd* written it—I really wouldn't. I'd only *written* that damn note so he wouldn't feel so bad about flunking me."

3. I didn't have anything special to do, so I went down to the can and chewed the rag with him while he was shaving. . . . I got bored sitting on that washbowl, so I started doing this tap-dance, just for the hell of it. I was just amusing myself. . . . Old Stradlater laughed. He didn't have too bad a sense of humor." (pp 26-9)

4. " 'Jane Gallagher. Jesus.' I couldn't get her off of my mind. I really couldn't. 'I ought to go down and say hello to her, at least.' 'Why the hell *don't*cha, instead of keep saying it?' Stradlater said. 'I'm not in the mood right now,' I said. I wasn't, either. You have to be in the mood for those things." (pp 32-3)