**Text 1: Excerpt from**[**‘Catcher in the Rye’**](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/opinion/sunday/the-case-for-delayed-adulthood.html)**by J.D. Salinger**

"Anyway, I like it now," I said. "I mean right now. Sitting here with you and just

chewing the fat and horsing--"

"That isn't anything really!"

"It is so something really! Certainly it is! Why the hell isn't it? People never think

anything is anything really. I'm getting goddam sick of it,"

"Stop swearing. All right, name something else. Name something you'd like to be.

Like a scientist. Or a lawyer or something."

"I couldn't be a scientist. I'm no good in science."

"Well, a lawyer--like Daddy and all."

"Lawyers are all right, I guess--but it doesn't appeal to me," I said. "I mean they're

all right if they go around saving innocent guys' lives all the time, and like that, but you

don't do that kind of stuff if you're a lawyer. All you do is make a lot of dough and play

golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot. And

besides. Even if you did go around saving guys' lives and all, how would you know if you

did it because you really wanted to save guys' lives, or because you did it because what

you really wanted to do was be a terrific lawyer, with everybody slapping you on the

back and congratulating you in court when the goddam trial was over, the reporters and

everybody, the way it is in the dirty movies? How would you know you weren't being a

phony? The trouble is, you wouldn't."

I'm not too sure old Phoebe knew what the hell I was talking about. I mean she's

only a little child and all. But she was listening, at least. If somebody at least listens, it's

not too bad.

"Daddy's going to kill you. He's going to kill you," she said.

I wasn't listening, though. I was thinking about something else--something crazy.

"You know what I'd like to be?" I said. "You know what I'd like to be? I mean if I had my

goddam choice?"

"What? Stop swearing."

"You know that song 'If a body catch a body comin' through the rye'? I'd like--"

"It's 'If a body meet a body coming through the rye'!" old Phoebe said. "It's a

poem. By Robert Burns."

"I know it's a poem by Robert Burns."

She was right, though. It is "If a body meet a body coming through the rye." I

didn't know it then, though.

"I thought it was 'If a body catch a body,'" I said. "Anyway, I keep picturing all

these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little

kids, and nobody's around--nobody big, I mean--except me. And I'm standing on the edge

of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over

the cliff--I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come

out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the

rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's

crazy."

**Text 2: Excerpt from**[**‘The Case for Delayed Adulthood’**](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/opinion/sunday/the-case-for-delayed-adulthood.html)**by Laurence Steinberg**

One of the most notable demographic trends of the last two decades has been the delayed entry of young people into adulthood. According to a large-scale national study conducted since the late 1970s, it has taken longer for each successive generation to finish school, establish financial independence, marry and have children. Today’s 25-year-olds, compared with their parents’ generation at the same age, are twice as likely to still be students, only half as likely to be married and 50 percent more likely to be receiving financial assistance from their parents.

People tend to react to this trend in one of two ways, either castigating today’s young people for their idleness or acknowledging delayed adulthood as a rational, if regrettable, response to a variety of social changes, like poor job prospects. Either way, postponing the settled, responsible patterns of adulthood is seen as a bad thing.

This is too pessimistic. Prolonged adolescence, in the right circumstances, is actually a good thing, for it fosters novelty-seeking and the acquisition of new skills.

Studies reveal adolescence to be a period of heightened “plasticity” during which the brain is highly influenced by experience. As a result, adolescence is both a time of opportunity and vulnerability, a time when much is learned, especially about the social world, but when exposure to stressful events can be particularly devastating. As we leave adolescence, a series of neurochemical changes make the brain increasingly less plastic and less sensitive to environmental influences. Once we reach adulthood, existing brain circuits can be tweaked, but they can’t be overhauled.

You might assume that this is a strictly biological phenomenon. But whether the timing of the change from adolescence to adulthood is genetically preprogrammed from birth or set by experience (or some combination of the two) is not known. Many studies find a marked decline in novelty-seeking as we move through our 20s, which may be a cause of this neurochemical shift, not just a consequence. If this is true — that a decline in novelty-seeking helps cause the brain to harden — it raises intriguing questions about whether the window of adolescent brain plasticity can be kept open a little longer by deliberate exposure to stimulating experiences that signal the brain that it isn’t quite ready for the fixity of adulthood.

Comparing Two or More Texts

Directions: Use the questions below to help you think about the relationship between two or more texts of any kind. Use the back of the sheet if you need more room to write.

Content: In your own words, what is each text saying?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Text 1 | Text 2 |
|  |  |

Similarities: How are these texts similar, connected or related? How are they alike, whether in terms of subject matter, theme, purpose, tone, etc.? What specific lines and details echo each other or connect?

Differences: How are the two different—again, in terms of subject matter, theme, purpose, tone or anything else? Where do they “disagree”?

The Two Texts Together: How does reading the two together make you see or understand things you might not if you read them separately? If the creators or subjects of these texts were to have a conversation, what is one thing they might say to each other?

Questions and Reactions: What questions do these texts and their content raise for you? What reactions do you have to them, either individually or together?

For Writing or Discussion

1. In this section of “Catcher,” Holden tells Phoebe about a “crazy” idea of who he would like to be when he grows up. What is the metaphorical cliff to which he refers? Why do the children need to be saved?

2. How does the subject of Holden and Phoebe’s conversation suggest, as Mr. Steinberg does, that adults are less plastic than children and adolescents? Do lawyers have to be as rigidly defined as they are by Holden?

3. How does the writer’s claim — “As a result, adolescence is both a time of opportunity and vulnerability, a time when much is learned, especially about the social world, but when exposure to stressful events can be particularly devastating” — capture Holden’s journey? What event in the novel devastates him? What does he learn about the social world as he travels around New York?

4. In the original Times review of the novel, Nash K. Burger paints Holden Caulfield as “bewildered, lonely, ludicrous and pitiful.” He goes on to observe: “His troubles, his failings are not of his own making but of a world that is out of joint. There is nothing wrong with him that a little understanding and affection, preferably from his parents, couldn’t have set right. Though confused and unsure of himself, like most 16-year-olds, he is observant and perceptive and filled with a certain wisdom. His minor delinquencies seem minor indeed when contrasted with adult delinquencies with which he is confronted.” As readers, are we meant to castigate Holden for his reluctance to grow up? Or are we meant to sympathize with it as a rational response to social changes?

5. In what ways can prolonged adolescence be a good thing?

6. Salinger and Mr. Steinberg are writing about two very different worlds — those of 1951 and today. In your view, how has adolescence changed? How has adulthood changed? Can you relate to Holden? How? Is reading “Catcher” still a “rite of passage”?