

Standards Focus: Exploring Expository Writing***Understanding and Dealing with Loss***

Many of the events that occur in *The Catcher in the Rye* are colored by or happen as a direct result of the main character's response to a major loss in his life. Keep the information on this page in mind as you read, and use it to evaluate Holden Caulfield's reactions and attitude.

The human response to loss most often manifests in grief. One school of thought relegates this response to a cycle that includes five **stages**. These include **denial, anger, bargaining, depression** and **acceptance**.

Denial - At this stage, the bereaved rejects the reality of the loss. He or she may refuse to accept that a loved one has passed.

Anger - During this stage, he or she may express resentment towards the departed. Blame may be placed on the loved one for leaving, friends and family for interfering or even just existing, or on the self for surviving or failing to rescue the loved one.

Bargaining - The bereaved may resort to attempting a deal with some higher power or spiritual leader. Some people hope for a trade-off, offering good works, a change in behavior, or their own lives for the return of their loved one.

Depression - When bargaining proves futile, the next step is withdrawal from the world and entrance into a deep period of despair.

Acceptance - He or she eventually comes to terms with the loss and can live a productive life.

This five-step model proved too simplistic and over the course of forty years of research another understanding of grief developed with the above as foundation. Psychiatrist John Bowlby, discusses grief as a succession of **waves**. Under this model, one who experiences loss is not expected to move through consecutive stages of emotion. Rather, he or she may experience any number of the following in random succession. These waves include **shock and denial, volatile reactions (yearning and searching), disorganization and despair**, and later **reorganization**.

Shock and denial - Feelings of unreality and withdrawal

Volatile Reactions - Feelings of anger and hatred, pain and terror, frustration and helplessness, resentment and jealousy

Disorganization and despair - Feelings of mourning and acute anguish

Reorganization - Feelings of understanding and incorporation of the loss into a new phase of life without the departed

In coping with the intense emotions associated with loss, many turn to professional guidance in the form of counselors, psychologists, and, if necessary, psychiatrists who may prescribe anti-depressant medication. Those who have suffered a loss often find it comforting to discuss it with these professionals, as well as family and friends. This mode of therapy was first introduced by Sigmund Freud with the "talking cure" in the early 1900's. He asserted that patients could recover from their problems by merely talking about them.

Others who have lost a loved one may also attempt to deal with loss through avoidance. This is related to the stage of denial, but may further isolate the survivor from his or her own emotions and surroundings. Avoiding the emotions that arise from loss may lead to greater pain, confusion, isolation, and a surge of aggression towards oneself or others. Moreover, those who avoid their pain and isolate themselves may experience nightmares, insomnia, problems with breathing and eating, and hallucinations.

Exploring Expository Writing—Understanding and Dealing with Loss

Directions: Using the article on page 12, “Understanding and Dealing with Loss,” answer the following multiple choice questions. Write the letter of the correct answer on the line.

1. _____ The author’s description of coping methods is:
 - a. cynical
 - b. detached and expository
 - c. emotionally charged and vague
 - d. optimistic

2. _____ The most appropriate paragraph to add to the end of this article would discuss:
 - a. modern grief therapy
 - b. a fictional character’s account of dealing with loss
 - c. an abstract history of psychology
 - d. experimental drug treatments for depression

3. _____ According to Psychiatrist John Bowlby, grief is a “succession of waves” that:
 - a. includes only shock
 - b. begins and ends in denial
 - c. occur in consecutive stages of emotion
 - d. may occur at random

4. Which view of grief do you feel is more accurate—stages or waves? Explain. _____

5. Why do you think that Freud’s “talking cure” is so effective? _____

6. What do you think is the most effective way to deal with loss? Tell which coping methods from the article you agree with and explain why. _____
