



STORYLAB

PRESENTS



S. E. HINTON'S

The Outsiders

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*



In *The Outsiders*, Ponyboy feels like he is an outsider and struggles with society's rules..

Fourteen-year-old Ponyboy Curtis is way too smart for his own good. Ponyboy is a “Greaser,” which means he wears leather jackets and slicked-back hair. Greasers have little money and live on the “wrong side” of town. On the “right side” of town, there are the “Socs,” or “Socials.” Socs are rich teens who drive fancy cars.

Ponyboy and his best friend Johnny meet two Soc girls, Cherry and Marcia, at a drive-in movie. Another greaser starts bothering the girls. After Johnny tells him to leave them alone, the girls sit with Ponyboy and Johnny. They talk and connect despite being from opposite sides of town.

When Cherry figures out that Ponyboy reads a lot, she says, “I’ll bet you watch sunsets, too.”

Bob is Cherry’s boyfriend. When Bob finds out Cherry has been hanging out with greasers, he’s furious. Bob and his drunk friends go hunting for Ponyboy and Johnny.

When the Socs find them, they start shoving Ponyboy’s head underwater in a fountain. Johnny recognizes Bob as the Soc who badly beat him up months earlier. When Johnny sees Bob about to kill his best friend, all that fear and rage explodes. He stabs Bob with the switchblade he’s been carrying since the beating.

Johnny may have killed Bob in self-defense, but Ponyboy and Johnny know Greasers are rarely believed. They run from the law and hide in an abandoned church.

One day, the church catches fire with some neighborhood children trapped inside. Ponyboy and Johnny save the children, but Johnny is hurt in the fire and dies from his injuries.

After that, Ponyboy fails classes at school and gets into fights. But when he reads Johnny’s final letter, he realizes Johnny’s story matters. He thinks telling it might save other kids. So Ponyboy begins writing his story—the story of Outsiders like them.

AN EXCERPT FROM *THE OUTSIDERS*



"I couldn't laugh because I was scared I'd drown in the smoke. The roar and crackling was getting louder, and Johnny shouted the next question. "Where's the kids?""

Ponyboy and Johnny have been hiding in an abandoned church for days after Johnny killed a Soc in self-defense. They've cut their hair and bleached Ponyboy's. They are trying to lay low until things cool down. When their friend Dallas finally comes to check on them, they decide it's time to turn themselves in.

But as they drive back toward town, they see something that changes everything: the old church is on fire. There's a crowd gathered, and they overhear someone say, "Some of the kids are missing." A school group had been having a picnic, and several young children are trapped inside the burning church.

I wasn't about to go through that flaming door, so I slammed a big rock through a window and pulled myself in. It was a wonder I didn't cut myself to death, now that I think about it.

"Hey, Ponyboy."

I looked around, startled. I hadn't realized Johnny had been right behind me all the way. I took a deep breath, and started coughing. The smoke filled my eyes and they started watering. "Is that guy coming?"

Johnny shook his head. "The window stopped him."

"Too scared?"

"Naw . . ." Johnny gave me a grin. "Too fat."

I couldn't laugh because I was scared I'd drown in the smoke. The roar and crackling was getting louder, and Johnny shouted the next question.

"Where's the kids?"

"In the back, I guess," I hollered, and we started stumbling through the church. I should be scared, I thought with an odd detached feeling, but I'm not. The cinders and embers began falling on us, stinging and smarting like ants. Suddenly, in the red glow and the haze, I remembered wondering what it was like in a burning ember, and I thought: Now I know, it's a red hell. Why aren't I scared?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

S. E. Hinton

S.E. Hinton grew up as Susan Eloise Hinton in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In 1965, when Susan was sixteen, she realized she was tired of reading stories about perfect teenagers living perfect lives. Where were the stories about teens like the ones at her school? The ones who didn't have money, who had to fight just to get by?

Susan decided to write a book about what teenage life was really like—a book that she would want to read. What came out was real, honest, and totally different from any book for teenagers.



Many of S.E. Hinton's novels became popular movies. In this picture, she is on set with actor Matt Dillion who starred as one of the characters in *The Outsiders*.

Her story was about Ponyboy Curtis, a fourteen-year-old “Greaser” stuck between being loyal to his gang and being true to himself. She wrote about how fast one fight could ruin everything.

Susan wrote like someone who really knew what it was like. She got the way teens talked, how they felt, and how badly they wanted to belong somewhere.

However, when she finished *The Outsiders*, Susan had a problem. Book companies didn't know what to do with her story. It was too grown-up for children's books, but too young for adult books. It also was written by a teenage girl.

But one editor saw something special. She saw that Susan understood how real teenagers talked and thought. The editor urged Susan to go by her initials “S.E.” to hide her gender.

The Outsiders came out in 1967 when Susan was just nineteen. It was a hit right away. Young readers finally found a book that felt like their real lives. The book was turned into a movie in 1983, and the story became legendary.

From her small bedroom in Oklahoma, a teenage girl had changed storytelling forever. Susan had created something brand new—stories written just for teenagers. She proved that great stories can come from telling the truth.

TEXT CONNECTION

Romeo and Juliet and *The Outsiders*

You might have read or heard about the play *Romeo and Juliet*, written by William Shakespeare. It is a tragedy about two young lovers, Romeo and Juliet. Their families forbid them from being together, and they take their own lives at the end of the play. S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* shares similar themes.

Romeo and Juliet are from families that hate each other for reasons nobody even remembers anymore. “Socs” and “Greasers” hate each other because one side has money and the other does not. Just like Romeo’s and Juliet’s families, they’re stuck in a cycle of violence that nobody questions.

Cherry Valance is a lot like Juliet. She is a rich girl who falls for someone from the “wrong” side of town. She can’t be with Ponyboy because their worlds are too different, just like Juliet couldn’t be with Romeo because of their families. Cherry doesn’t die for love like Juliet does. But Cherry has to live with dating someone she doesn’t love or respect.

Romeo and Juliet die because they can’t handle living in a world that keeps them apart. Johnny dies trying to save children from a fire. But he never would have been in that church if the Socs hadn’t jumped him and Ponyboy, and they did so because Ponyboy refused to keep apart from Cherry.



In *Romeo and Juliet*, two teenagers fall in love despite the rules of their society that want to keep them apart.

Both stories are basically asking: How many people have to die before society realizes their pointless feuds are destroying lives? In *Romeo and Juliet*, it takes the deaths of both teenagers for the families to wake up. In *The Outsiders*, it takes Johnny dying for people to start seeing Greasers as heroes instead of just troublemakers.

Shakespeare set his story in palaces. Hinton set hers in regular neighborhoods. But the message is identical: When you divide people into “us” and “them,” everybody loses.

TEXT REFLECTION

The Real Meaning of Courage



S.E. Hinton shows the Greasers doing the right thing, even when society expects that they will not.

Think about your favorite story hero. They're probably strong and fearless, and they always know exactly what to do. The good guys win, and the world is saved. But real courage and heroism is way messier than that. S.E. Hinton understands this point.

When Johnny and Ponyboy run into the burning church to save the children, they do not have superpowers. They are just two scared teenagers who know they have to do something. They are terrified but make the decision to act

anyway. That's real courage: acting when everything in your body is screaming at you to run the other way.

There is also the character of Dallas Winston. He is the guy everyone calls a hoodlum. Dallas has a police record and a bad attitude. But he shows courage too. When Johnny is dying in that hospital, Dallas risks everything to be there for him.

Ponyboy is also brave. He decides to tell Johnny's story. He revisits this difficult time in his life with honesty and openness.

Society loves simple hero stories. The good guy saves the day. Everyone cheers. But think about the real courage you see every day: The person who stands up to bullies. The student who speaks up in class despite their anxiety. The friend who tells you the truth when everyone else just tells you what you want to hear.

Sometimes courage looks like Dallas. It is raw, desperate, and self-destructive. Sometimes it looks like Johnny. It is quiet, unexpected, and life-changing. And sometimes it looks like Ponyboy, surviving trauma and choosing to tell the story anyway.

The point isn't that we should run into burning buildings. Courage is not about being fearless or getting applause. It is about being terrified and doing the right thing anyway. It's about showing up when it matters, even when—especially when—nobody's watching.

What Is Realistic Fiction? S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* is considered realistic fiction. Realistic fiction consists of:

- a made-up story but set in the real world;
- a conflict that could happen today; and
- convincing and believable characters.

Keep Reading: Want to read more of *The Outsiders*?

- Visit the library to get a copy of *The Outsiders*
- **If you like *The Outsiders***, then you might also like to read these realistic fiction texts:
 - *Brighter Than the Sun* by Daniel Aleman
 - *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
 - *Piecing Me Together* by Renée Watson

Start Writing: Inspired to write your own realistic fiction?

Consider this prompt to get started:

"I use to think our group was unbreakable, and that I would always feel a part of it. But everything changed when..."



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