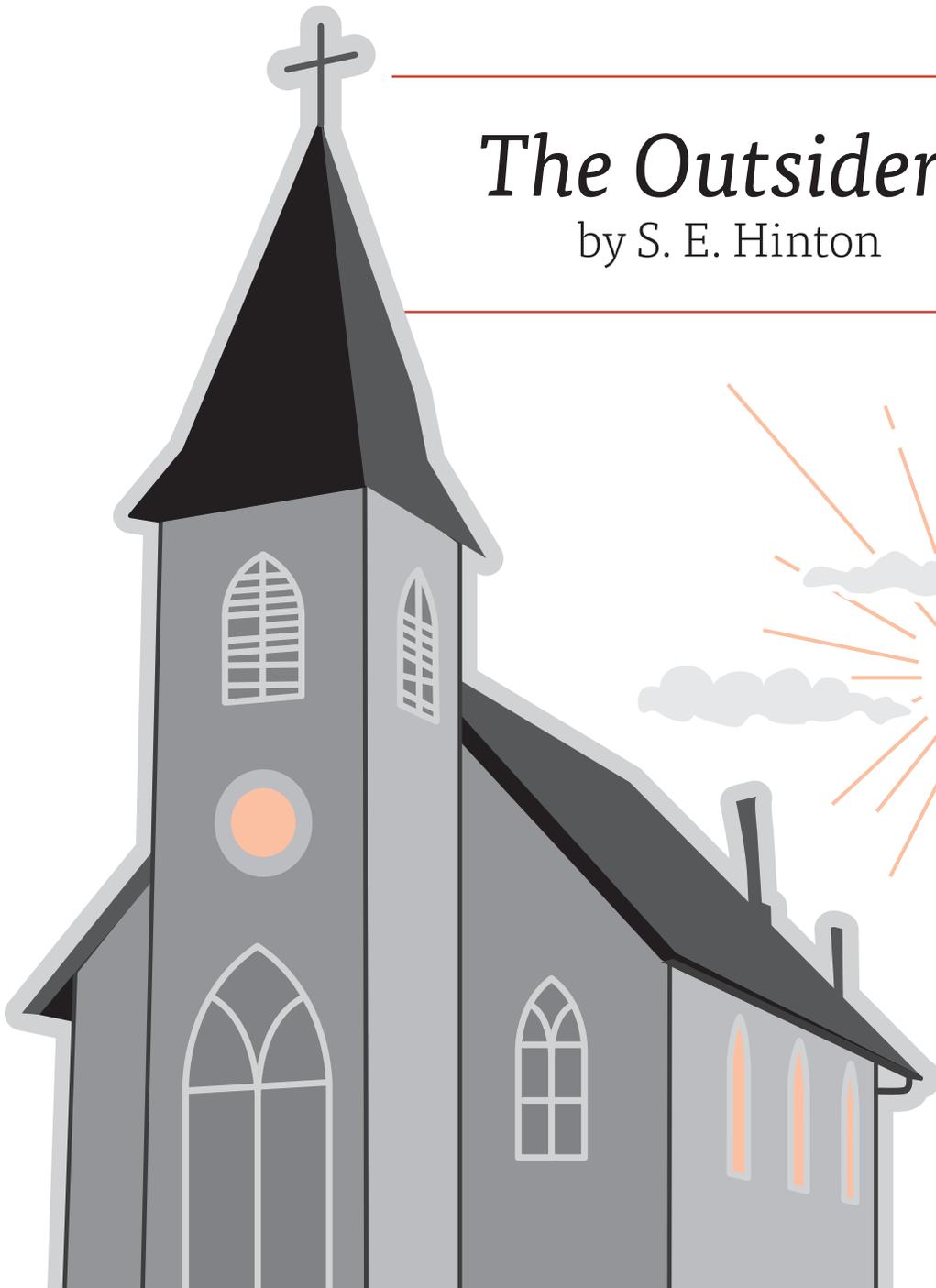


Novel Guide • Student Edition

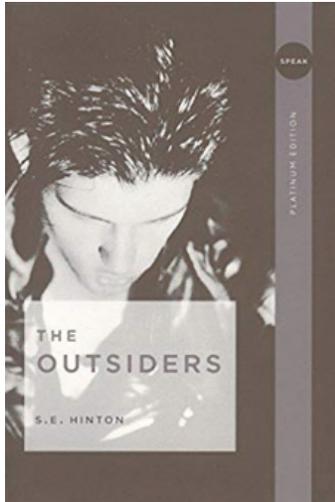


The Outsiders

by S. E. Hinton



Part 1: Introduction



The Outsiders, by S. E. Hinton

About the story

The Outsiders is wildly popular in middle school classrooms. And it's easy to see why. Although the novel was written by S. E. Hinton more than 50 years ago, the themes and central focus remain relevant today. Students still relate to the idea of being an outsider, the appeal of finding common ground with others, and the complex question of conformity versus nonconformity.

The story revolves around 14-year-old Ponyboy and his two older brothers, Soda and Darry. After their parents die in a car crash, the brothers struggle to find their footing as a family and as part of society. They find a community by becoming part of a gang called the greasers.

About the author

S. E. Hinton, an American writer born in 1948, wrote *The Outsiders* when she was in high school. The book has gone on to sell more than 14 million copies and continues to sell upwards of 500,000 every year. Hinton has published nine books, many of them award winners. She has won the ALA Best Book for Young Adults four times.

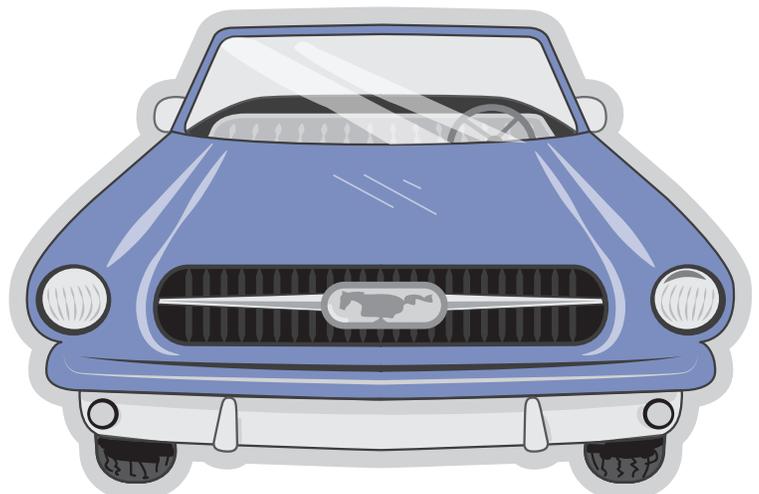
Part 2: Text Excerpt and Close Reading Activities

Excerpt: *The Outsiders*, pages 1–4

- 1 When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home. I was wishing I looked like Paul Newman — he looks tough and I don't — but I guess my own looks aren't so bad. I have light-brown, almost-red hair and greenish-gray eyes. I wish they were more gray, because I hate most guys that have green eyes, but I have to be content with what I have. My hair is longer than a lot of boys wear theirs, squared off in back and long at the front and sides, but I am a greaser and most of my neighborhood rarely bothers to get a haircut. Besides, I look better with long hair.
- 2 I had a long walk home and no company, but I usually lone it anyway, for no reason except that I like to watch movies undisturbed so I can get into them and live them with the actors. When I see a movie with someone it's kind of uncomfortable, like having someone read your book over your shoulder. I'm different that way. I mean, my second-oldest brother, Soda, who is sixteen-going-on-seventeen, never cracks a book at all, and my oldest brother, Darrel, who we call Darry, works too long and hard to be interested in a story or drawing a picture, so I'm not like them. And nobody in our gang digs movies and books the way I do. For a while there, I thought I was the only person in the world that did. So I loned it.
- 3 Soda tries to understand, at least, which is more than Darry does. But then, Soda is different from anybody; he understands everything, almost. Like he's never hollering at me all the time the way Darry is, or treating me as if I was six instead of fourteen. I love Soda more than I've ever loved anyone, even Mom and Dad. He's always happy-go-lucky and grinning, while Darry's hard and firm and rarely grins at all. But then, Darry's gone through a lot in his twenty years, grown up too fast. Sodapop'll never grow up at all. I don't know which way's the best. I'll find out one of these days.



- 4 Anyway, I went on walking home, thinking about the movie, and then suddenly wishing I had some company. greasers can't walk alone too much or they'll get jumped, or someone will come by and scream "Greaser!" at them, which doesn't make you feel too hot, if you know what I mean. We get jumped by the Socs. I'm not sure how you spell it, but it's the abbreviation for the Socials, the jet set, the West-side rich kids. It's like the term "greaser," which is used to class all us boys on the East Side.
- 5 We're poorer than the Socs and the middle class. I reckon we're wilder too. Not like the Socs, who jump greasers and wreck houses and throw beer blasts for kicks, and get editorials in the paper for being a public disgrace one day and an asset to society the next. Greasers are almost like hoods; we steal things and drive old souped-up cars and hold up gas stations and have a gang fight once in a while. I don't mean I do things like that. Darry would kill me if I got into trouble with the police. Since Mom and Dad were killed in an auto wreck, the three of us get to stay together only as long as we behave. So Soda and I stay out of trouble as much as we can, and we're careful not to get caught when we can't. I only mean that most greasers do things like that, just like we wear our hair long and dress in blue jeans and T-shirts, or leave our shirttails out and wear leather jackets and tennis shoes or boots. I'm not saying that either Socs or greasers are better; that's just the way things are.
- 6 I could have waited to go to the movies until Darry or Sodapop got off work. They would have gone with me, or driven me there, or walked along, although Soda just can't sit still long enough to enjoy a movie and they bore Darry to death. Darry thinks his life is enough without inspecting other people's. Or I could have gotten one of the gang to come along, one of the four boys Darry and Soda and I have grown up with and consider family. We're almost as close as brothers; when you grow up in a tight-knit neighborhood like ours you get to know each other real well. If I had thought about it, I could have called Darry and he would have come by on his way home and picked me up, or Two-Bit Mathews — one of our gang — would have come to get me in his car if I had asked him, but sometimes I just don't use my head. It drives my brother Darry nuts when I do stuff like that, 'cause I'm supposed to be smart; I make good grades and have a high IQ and everything, but I don't use my head. Besides, I like walking.



Step 1: Close Reading Activity

1. Highlight words and phrases that Ponyboy uses to describe what it means to be a “greaser.” (Where do they live? What do they look like? What do they do? Who are their friends and enemies?)
2. Work with a partner and use your highlights to create a list of four key things Ponyboy says define a “greaser.”
3. With your partner, reread and circle words and phrases that Ponyboy uses to describe himself.
4. Looking back at your greaser list, name two things that define a “greaser” that also define Ponyboy.
5. Choose a sentence from the excerpt that you think describes what Ponyboy thinks is the best part of being a greaser. Choose one that represents the worst part.
6. Does Ponyboy’s writing make you think he is proud of being a greaser? What are one or two details you would point to in your answer?

Step 2: Connected Excerpts to Continue Close Reading

Pages 26–31: Sodapop and Ponyboy first meet Cherry and Marcia.

Pages 34–36: Ponyboy and Cherry continue to interact.

Pages 70–72: Ponyboy gets his hair cut.

Pages 133–137: The greasers are on their way to fight.

Pages 178–180: Ponyboy reads the note from Johnny and decides to be a writer.

Step 3: Writing Prompt

Ponyboy changes during the course of the novel. Does his point of view about being a greaser change? Use evidence from the text in your answer.

Part 3: Additional Guiding Questions and Projects

Step 4: Guiding Questions to Read the Whole Book

1. **Chapters 1–2:** What horrible event happened to Johnny and how did it change him?
2. **Chapters 3–4:** After Ponyboy and Cherry talk, how does Ponyboy begin to see the Socs differently?
3. **Chapters 5–6:** Why does Johnny decide that he and Ponyboy should turn themselves in to the police?
4. **Chapters 7–8:** Ponyboy says “we could get along without anyone but Johnny.” What does he mean?
5. **Chapters 9–10:** How does Ponyboy’s perception of Darry change and why?
6. **Chapters 11–12:** What does Johnny mean when he tells Ponyboy to “stay gold”?

Step 5: Extended Discussion Questions

- Ponyboy and Johnny had difficult issues that were beyond their abilities to resolve. What were those problems?
- Who could they have talked to about these issues?
- Who would you have talked to?

Step 6: Writer’s Craft

Hinton tells us who Ponyboy is by showing us the way he talks. She uses slang she knows we won’t know, and subtly helps us figure it out.

- **Example 1:** Page 1: Ponyboy says, “I usually lone it.” The sentences that follow show what he means: seeing movies solo, reading books, drawing. In essence, “going it alone.” The final sentence reinforces the meaning by repeating “So I loned it.”
- **Example 2:** Page 20: Ponyboy warns that “no one wants to be around when the fuzz shows up.” “Fuzz” refers to the police. This nickname refers to their military-style haircuts. The definition of fuzz is easy to understand in the context of the sentence but it also provides a way for Hinton to point to a boldness and a disrespect for police when she has Ponyboy use it. It shows an attitude that runs deep with greasers and gives the reader another clue to their identity.

Find three other ways in which Ponyboy or another character uses language in unique ways.

Write down three words or phrases that you and your friends use a lot that may be different from the way your parents or another group of kids speaks.

Part 4: Final Projects

Step 7: Writing Prompt

Violence, even murder, plays a central role in *The Outsiders*. Was Johnny wrong to have murdered Bob? If he had lived, should he have gone to prison? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Step 8: Compare and Contrast

Compare Gwendolyn Brooks's poem "We Real Cool" to *The Outsiders*.

Gwendolyn Brooks was born in 1917. She wrote more than twenty books of poetry and was the first black woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in poetry, among many other prestigious awards.

Discussion questions or Writing Prompts:

1. Who is the "we" in the poem? How would you describe them?
2. Are the characters in the poem similar to or different from the characters in *The Outsiders*? Explain.
3. The poem ends with "We / Die soon." Would this ending make sense for *The Outsiders*? Explain your answer.
4. Compare reading the poem silently and listening to Gwendolyn Brooks read the poem. How are they different? How are they similar?

Step 9: Challenge

The Outsiders + Street Roots News

The Outsiders was based on S. E. Hinton's high school experience in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the 1960s. The news article you are about to read is focused on gang members in Portland, Oregon, and was written in 2016. After reading the article, write about what has changed and what has stayed the same since S. E. Hinton wrote *The Outsiders*. Explain using evidence from the text.

As you read the article, underline phrases or sentences that are similar to *The Outsiders*, and circle phrases that are different.

Street Roots News

Youths and the gang life: Their stories, in their words

Young adults doing time for gang violence talk about their paths and what might prevent other kids from following in their footsteps

by Emily Green | 5 May 2016

Portland is about to enter a second consecutive summer filled with what's predicted to be a record-breaking level of gang shootings, homicides and violence.

The gunmen are getting younger and younger, and the violence increasingly senseless, according to those who work with current and formerly incarcerated gang members in the Portland-metro area....

...The perspective of those who pull the trigger is seldom explored.

Who are they? What happened to them before they found themselves with a weapon in hand, not caring about the consequences of taking another human being's life?

Street Roots sat down with young adults serving lengthy sentences in Oregon Youth Authority correctional facilities, for crimes ranging from armed robbery to murder, and asked them these questions. All the youths are either gang members or deeply gang-involved....

Gang member interview:

Josefina, 20

Josefina is serving her sentence at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility in Albany, an all-girls facility. She joined a gang shortly before her arrest and had been gang-involved for some time leading up to it.

"I was born and raised in Northeast Portland. My family — we're kind of tight, but we weren't

really close. It was the struggles we went through growing up — we came together.

“We’d be homeless for a couple weeks at a time. We usually got kicked out because my brother would throw parties at the house or terrorize the neighbors. We’d live in our van or live with friends, but it wasn’t for that long, but long enough to know how it feels to be homeless. Or my mom wouldn’t have enough money for the bills and our water would get shut off — or our electricity. Stuff like that, and living in Northeast Portland growing up, there was a lot of gang violence, especially in the area we lived in...

“I have three sisters and three brothers. One of them was adopted; she was my friend, and my mom took her in. The oldest two had a rare bone disease and needed special medical care, so my mom had to give them to this family that specialized in medical stuff.

“I didn’t have a dad. I’m the baby of the family, but I was the only one who had a different dad.

“My oldest brother that lived with us, he’s like really crazy, and he was getting into trouble.

“My brother being involved in gangs kind of made me be involved. But the stuff I went through with my brothers when I was little, I didn’t really look up to them.

“I didn’t really look up to anybody, because I didn’t have any strong figures in my family. I didn’t even look up to my mom; she was my hero, but I didn’t look up to her.

“My fourth-grade teacher; something about me, she wanted to help me, I got involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, and she was like my mentor-type person. Ever since fourth grade, she was my big sister. Me and her still maintain contact.”

“I started getting into trouble around fifth grade. I started having troubles in school. Up until sixth grade I got A’s and B’s.

“Maybe the fact that I didn’t have a father figure, my dad died before I was born, and my brothers, they were the only male figures that were there, and having them abuse me, physically, mentally, emotionally, like I think that was my biggest thing when I was younger.

“When I was 12, my cousin — she was the leader of this gang — and I hung out with them, but I wasn’t really in one. But a couple months before I got locked up, I actually got jumped into my cousin’s rival gang, which was kind of like a dis on her because I didn’t really like her...”

Step 10: Extra

Today, you will role-play either a newspaper reporter or a character from *The Outsiders*.

Decide with your partner who will be the interviewer and who will role-play either Ponyboy, Sodapop, or Cherry. Work together to come up with a list of five or more questions that will reveal factual information about the character gathered from the text, in addition to imaginative answers that will provide an idea of what happened to the character after the book ended.

When creating the list of questions, remember to ask...

- open-ended questions that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
- follow-up questions to get your interviewee to provide details.

Record or take notes during your interview and work together to write a newspaper article based on the interview.

When writing the newspaper article, remember to include...

- a lead sentence that grabs the reader.
- an introduction that tells the reader where and when the story happened.
- a main paragraph that is the heart of the story.
- a conclusion that sums up the story.

Step 11: Extended Reading

- *That Was Then, This Is Now* by S. E. Hinton
- *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
- *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier
- *The Stars Beneath Our Feet* by David Barclay Moore
- *Miracle's Boys* by Jacqueline Woodson