

The Outsiders

 S. E. Hinton

 Chapters 1–2

 Summary: Chapter 1

 Ponyboy Curtis, the narrator, begins the novel with a story: he is walking home one afternoon after watching a Paul Newman film, and his mind starts to wander. He thinks about how he wants Paul Newman's good looks, though he likes his own greaser look. He also thinks that, although he likes to watch movies alone, he wishes he had company for the walk home.

 Ponyboy steps back from his story to explain that walking alone is unsafe for greasers, the East Side gang of friends to which he belongs. When they walk by themselves, greasers attract the harassment of Socials, or Socs, the rich West Side crowd. Ponyboy says that greasers are poorer and wilder than the Socs, whom the newspapers condemn one day for throwing parties and praise the next day for good citizenship. Greasers wear their hair long and put grease in it. They dress tough, steal, and get into gang fights. They often carry switchblades, mainly to help them stand their ground against the Socs.

 Ponyboy says he does not participate in typical greaser mischief because his oldest brother, Darrell (known as “Darry”), would kill him if he got into trouble. Ponyboy's parents died in a car crash, so the three Curtis brothers live together by themselves, an arrangement possible only as long as they stay out of trouble. Twenty-year-old Darry acts as head of the family. He is strict with Ponyboy and often yells at him. Despite his intelligence, Ponyboy lacks common sense, which frustrates Darry. Ponyboy feels great affection for his sixteen-year-old brother, Sodapop, whose charm and cheerfulness he admires.

 Ponyboy returns to the story of his solitary walk after the movies. As he walks, he notices a red Corvair trailing him. He quickens his pace as he remembers how badly the Socs beat his friend Johnny Cade. The Corvair pulls up beside Ponyboy and five Socs climb out and surround him. One of them asks, “Need a haircut, greaser?” and pulls out a blade. The Socs begin to beat up Ponyboy, who screams for help. Ponyboy's brothers and the rest of their group appear on the scene and chase away the Socs. Darry starts to scold Ponyboy for walking home alone instead of calling for a ride, but Sodapop tells him to stop nagging.

 The brothers and the other greasers and make plans for the following night. Ponyboy decides that he and Johnny will go to a double feature at the drive-in with their friend Dally. Dally begins to talk about his ex-girlfriend, Sylvia, and Ponyboy thinks about the girls that socialize with the greasers. He wonders what it would be like to spend time with an upper-class Soc girl.

 At home, Ponyboy, who loves to read, reads *Great Expectations* and thinks about how his life resembles the life of Pip, the main character in *Great Expectations.* Still shaken by his fight with the Socs, Ponyboy climbs into bed with Sodapop. The brothers talk about Sodapop's girlfriend, Sandy, whom Sodapop hopes to marry one day.

Summary: Chapter 2

 The next night, Ponyboy and Johnny go with Dally to a double feature at the drive-in movie theatre. They sit behind a pair of Soc girls, and Dally begins to talk dirty in an attempt to embarrass the girls. The girl with red hair turns around and coolly tells him to stop, but Dally continues to make suggestive remarks. He goes to buy Cokes, and Ponyboy talks to the red-haired girl, Cherry Valance. They talk about the rodeo and about Sodapop, whom Cherry describes as a “doll.” She asks what became of Sodapop, and although the admission embarrasses him, Ponyboy says that Sodapop dropped out of school to work in a gas station. Cherry and her friend Marcia invite Ponyboy and Johnny to watch the movie with them. Dally comes back and offers a Coke to Cherry, but she throws it in his face. Dally tries to put his arm around her. When he will not listen to Cherry's protests, the usually quiet Johnny stuns Dally by telling him not to bother the girls.

 Dally stalks off, and the boys sit with the girls and watch the movie. Two-Bit, one of Ponyboy's friends, comes to announce that Dally has slashed Tim Shepard's tyres and is going to have to fight him. Tim Shepard is the leader of another greaser gang. Two-Bit explains the greasers' two main rules: always stick together and never get caught.

 Cherry and Ponyboy go to get popcorn, and Ponyboy tells her about the time the Socs beat up Johnny. The leader of the gang that beat him, Ponyboy says, wore a fistful of rings. Cherry looks distressed and assures him that not all Socs are violent like the Socs that beat Johnny. She also tells him that Socs have problems just as the greasers do, but Ponyboy does not believe her.

Analysis: Chapters 1–2

*The Outsiders*' primary concern is to explore the effect of social class on young people. The novel begins by detailing the differences between the poor greasers and the rich Socs and sketching the treacherous world in which they live. When the Socs jump Ponyboy in the opening chapter, it suggests that Ponyboy lives in a place where even an innocent walk is fraught with danger.

 Hinton defines her characters as she thinks people should be defined in life—not according to the group to which they belong, but according to their individual characteristics. For instance, she introduces Ponyboy not as a tough street youth but as a boy who likes to read and watch sunsets. Ponyboy is something of an anthropologist, a natural role for a narrator, and he observes and records the group dynamics and individual traits of his fellow greasers. Darry is presented not as the natural leader of the gang, but as a struggling young man who has had to forgo an education so that he can support and raise his two younger brothers. Hinton suggests that greasers, despite their exclusion from the mainstream, have moral grounding and sense of decency as strong as—or stronger than—the kids from the privileged classes.

 Hinton shows the constant conflict between the greasers and the Socs, but she also shows that the two groups are not as different as they initially appear. After meeting faceless, cruel Socs, we meet Cherry Valance, a Soc who is also a sympathetic, warm girl. She and Ponyboy discuss how greasers and Socs deal with their problems differently. Greasers feel their distress keenly, while Socs pretend their problems do not exist. Ponyboy's and Cherry's discussion reveals that, despite different methods of coping, both Socs and greasers must deal with difficulties. The conversation between Cherry and Ponyboy exemplifies the rare civil negotiation that would alleviate the tensions between the Socs and greasers far more than violent conflict. The flirtation between Two-Bit and Marcia demonstrates the social compatibility that could exist between the warring groups.

 Hinton suggests that male-female friendships are the friendships most likely to result in peace between the groups. In the first half of the novel, all encounters between male greasers and male Socs result in violence, whereas encounters between male greasers and female Socs sometimes end in laughter and flirtation. This difference suggests that gang rivalry stems from male hatred of other males. Conversely, the strongly masculine nature of the rivalry means that internal group bonding is also strongly masculine. Female greasers essentially do not exist in this novel; they are discussed, but they never appear as characters. Their absence emphasizes the intense male bonding among the greasers.

 In the Young Adult fiction genre, *The Outsiders* is unique in its early suggestion that the rival groups are not that different from each other. By establishing this commonality at the beginning, Hinton throws us off balance. That Hinton raises the possibility of resolution between gangs so early but delays resolution for so long keeps the focus on the individual issues that Ponyboy and others face.

 Chapters 3–4

Summary: Chapter 3

*Just don't forget that some of us watch the sunset too.*

Ponyboy, Two-Bit, and Johnny walk to Two-Bit's house with Cherry and Marcia so that they can give the girls a ride home. As they walk, Ponyboy and Cherry talk about Ponyboy's brothers. He notices how easy it is to talk to Cherry. When Cherry asks Ponyboy to describe Darry, he says Darry does not like him and probably wishes he could put Ponyboy in a home somewhere. Johnny and Two-Bit are startled to hear that Ponyboy feels this way, and Johnny says he always thought the three brothers got along well.

 After Ponyboy tells Cherry about Sodapop's old horse, Mickey Mouse, the two move on to discuss the differences they perceive between Socs and greasers. During this discussion, Ponyboy and Cherry find they have a surprising amount in common—for instance, they both like reading and watching sunsets. Ponyboy voices his frustration that the greasers have terrible luck while the Socs lead comfortable lives and jump the greasers out of sheer boredom. Cherry retorts that the Socs' situations are not as simple as Ponyboy thinks. They decide that the main difference between Socs and greasers is that Socs are too cool and aloof to acknowledge their emotions and that they live their lives trying to fill up their emotional void, while the greasers feel everything too intensely. Ponyboy realizes that, although they come from different classes, he and Cherry watch the same sunset.

 A blue Mustang cruises by the group. The Mustang belongs to Bob and Randy, Cherry's and Marcia's Soc boyfriends. The Mustang pulls up beside the group, and Randy and Bob get out. Ponyboy notices that Bob wears three heavy rings on his hand. The greasers and Socs nearly get into a fight, but the girls agree to leave with their boyfriends to prevent violence. Before leaving, Cherry tells Ponyboy that she hopes she won't see Dally again, because she thinks she could fall in love with him.

 Ponyboy walks home and finds Darry furious with him for staying out so late. In the ensuing argument, Darry slaps Ponyboy. No one in Ponyboy's family has ever hit him before, and Ponyboy storms out of the house in a rage. He feels sure now that Darry does not want him around. It is after two o'clock in the morning. Ponyboy finds Johnny in the lot where the greasers hang out, and he tells Johnny that they are running away. Johnny, who lives with his abusive alcoholic father, agrees to run away without hesitating. The boys decide to walk through the park and determine whether they really want to leave.

 Summary: Chapter 4

 The park is deserted at 2:30 in the morning. Ponyboy and Johnny go walking beside the fountain. It is cold out, and Ponyboy is wearing only a short-sleeved shirt. Suddenly the boys see the blue Mustang from earlier that night. Five Socs, including Randy and Bob, jump out of the car and approach them. Presumably, the Socs have come to get even with the boys for picking up their girlfriends. Ponyboy can tell they are drunk. Bob tells Ponyboy that greasers are white trash with long hair, and Ponyboy retorts that Socs are nothing but white trash with Mustangs and madras shirts. In a rage, Ponyboy spits at the Socs. A Soc grabs Ponyboy and holds his head under the frigid water of the fountain. Ponyboy feels himself drowning and blacks out. When he regains consciousness, the Socs have run away. He is lying on the pavement next to Johnny. Bob's bloody corpse is nearby. Johnny says, “I killed him,” and Ponyboy sees Johnny's switchblade, dark to the hilt with blood.

 Ponyboy panics, but Johnny remains calm. They decide to go to Dally, thinking he might be able to help them. They find Dally at the house of Buck Merril, his rodeo partner. He manages to get the boys fifty dollars, a change of clothing for Ponyboy, and a loaded gun. He instructs them to take a train to Windrixville, where they can hide in an abandoned church. Ponyboy and Johnny get on a train, and Ponyboy goes to sleep. When they get to Windrixville, they hop off the train and find the church, where they collapse into exhausted sleep.

Analysis: Chapters 3–4

 In these chapters, Hinton uses symbols to represent the tensions between the two socioeconomic groups. The Socs' blue Mustang symbolizes their class and power, since a greaser could never afford such a “tuff car.” The Mustang symbolizes the economic divide between the two groups and points to a major source of the tensions between them. In this section, and in most of the novel, the greasers move about on foot, leaving themselves vulnerable to the Socs, who are protected in their cars. Bob's ring collection is another material manifestation of the Socs' wealth and, by contrast, the greasers' poverty. Ponyboy identifies Bob, a Soc, by the large rings he wears on his fingers, and, of course, jewelry of this kind is a traditional symbol of wealth. But Bob also uses these rings as weapons in his attacks, in the same way that brass knuckles are used to increase the damage of a punch in a fight. Therefore, on a symbolic level, Bob transforms his wealth into a physical weapon. Greasers, on the other hand, cannot represent themselves with material luxuries. Their primary identifying symbol is their long hair. Unlike cars or rings, hair is a costless symbol, all the cheaper because the greasers do not have to pay to cut or style their hair. Cars and jewelry symbolize the Socs; hair symbolizes the greasers. These superficial features differentiate the two gangs, reinforcing the role that material acquisitions play in forging the novel's group identities.

 This section introduces the novel's major crisis. When the Socs attack Ponyboy and Johnny, but they also are not only trespassing on greaser territory, they are starting an unfair fight and taking advantage of the boys' physical vulnerability. On a psychological level, this incident presents a crisis for Ponyboy because it casts doubt in his mind over the burgeoning conclusions he makes about the commonalities between the Socs and the greasers. Still, Hinton makes Johnny's killing of Bob morally uncomplicated. If Johnny had not attacked Bob, Ponyboy would have drowned. Although Johnny commits murder, he does not lose our sympathy. Hinton portrays him not as a killer but as a defender of his friend's life and a victim of tragic circumstance. His actions are regrettable, but his motives and values are noble—he wants to save his friend's life.

 As a result of the murder, Johnny and Ponyboy attain a new status in the narrative, as well as among the greasers. Initially, both boys play passive roles in the narrative and in their social group. Ponyboy plays the role of an observer and is seen as a “tagalong,” while Johnny rarely even speaks. By murdering a Soc, however, Johnny becomes an adult. He shows his strength when he remains calm after the murder and rationally determines a course of action. Ponyboy's proximity to the murder makes him important, not least because he unintentionally motivates Johnny to murder Bob. Accidentally, the two boys begin to take an active role in the story, instigating events, exacerbating tensions between the two gangs, and pushing the narrative forward.

Chapters 5–6 Summary: Chapter 5

*Dally was so real he scared me.*

The next morning, Ponyboy wakes in the church and finds a note from Johnny saying that he has gone into town to get supplies. When Johnny returns, he brings a week's supply of bologna and cigarettes, and a paperback copy of Gone with the Wind, which he wants Ponyboy to read to him. Ponyboy makes a wisecrack and Johnny tells him he is becoming more like Two-Bit every day. Johnny insists that they cut their hair to disguise themselves, and he bleaches Ponyboy's hair.

 For the next week, the boys hide out at the church, reading Gone with the Wind, smoking, and eating sandwiches. The boys admire the southern gentlemen in Gone with the Wind, and Johnny points out that they remind him of Dally. Ponyboy disagrees. He prefers the other greasers to Dally. Most of the greasers remind Ponyboy of the heroes in novels, but Dally is so real he is frightening. Later, Ponyboy recites a Robert Frost poem, “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” The poem touches Johnny.

 After about five days, Dally shows up at the church with a letter to Ponyboy from Sodapop. Dally says the police approached him about Bob's murder and he told them that the perpetrators fled to Texas. He takes Johnny and Ponyboy to the Dairy Queen and tells them that a state of open warfare exists between the greasers and the Socs, who are furious about Bob's death. He also lets slip that Cherry Valance, feeling responsible for the murderous encounter, has been acting as a spy for the greasers. He adds that in a day's time the two groups will meet for a rumble.

 Summary: Chapter 6

 Johnny shocks Dally by telling him he wants to go back home and confess to his crime. Dally tries to change Johnny's mind, telling him he never wants to see Johnny hardened the way prison would harden him. Johnny is adamant and points out that his own parents would not care what happens to him, but Ponyboy's brothers care about him and want to see him. Swearing under his breath, Dally begins to drive Johnny and Ponyboy home. As they drive past the church where Ponyboy and Johnny have been staying, they see that it is on fire. Ponyboy thinks he and Johnny must have started the fire with a cigarette butt, so the boys jump out of the car to examine the blaze.

 At the church, they find a group of schoolchildren on a picnic. Suddenly, one of the adult chaperones cries out that some of the children are missing, and Ponyboy hears screaming from inside the church. Acting on instinct, he and Johnny climb into the burning building through a window. At the back of the church, they find the children huddled together and terrified. As he runs through the smoky inferno, Ponyboy wonders why he is not scared. He and Johnny lift the children out of the window. Dally appears and yells that the roof is about to cave in. As they lift the last child out the window, the roof crumbles. Johnny pushes Ponyboy out of the window, and then Ponyboy hears Johnny scream. Ponyboy starts to go back in for Johnny, but Dally clubs him across the back and knocks him out.

 When Ponyboy wakes, he is in an ambulance, accompanied by one of the schoolteachers, Jerry Wood. The teacher tells him that his back caught on fire and that the jacket he was wearing, which Dally lent him, saved his life. He says that Dally was burned but will probably be fine. Johnny, however, is in very bad shape—he was struck by a piece of burning timber as it fell, and may have broken his back. The man jokingly asks Ponyboy if he and Johnny are professional heroes. Ponyboy tells him that they are juvenile delinquents.

 Ponyboy has suffered mild burns. Jerry stays with him while he is in the hospital, and Ponyboy confides the story of Bob's death. Jerry agrees that Johnny killed Bob in self-defense. He tells Ponyboy he shouldn't smoke, something that no one has ever said to Ponyboy before. Darry and Sodapop arrive. Sodapop hugs Ponyboy, and Darry cries, shocking Ponyboy. The anger he has felt toward Darry dissolves. Ponyboy realizes that Darry does care about him; Darry is strict because he loves Ponyboy and wants him to succeed. Ponyboy runs across the room and embraces his brother, thinking that everything will be fine once he gets home.

Analysis: Chapters 5–6

 The Robert Frost poem Ponyboy recites to Johnny in Chapter 5, “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” speaks of innocence by using metaphors from nature. The poem comes to symbolize the innocence of Johnny and Ponyboy. Not all of the greasers possess this innocence, and they long for Johnny and Ponyboy to retain theirs. The poem also suggests the impermanence of gold, pointing to the ending of the idyllic male bonding that Johnny and Ponyboy experience during their week of hiding out and foreshadowing the eventual end of their companionship.

 In Chapter 5, the two young men talk and think extensively about what makes them the way they are. Ponyboy thinks about the honor code of the greasers, and suggests that they can be proud of their hair, if nothing else. When Johnny and Ponyboy cut their hair, which has long identified them as greasers, they symbolically shed their social identities. This partial freedom from their social category enables them to communicate more effectively and question the purpose behind their lifestyle. Johnny begins to think that greasers can take pride in their spirit and heritage, not just in their hair. He is finds the southern gentlemen in Gone with the Wind interesting, and he and Ponyboy begin to see their gang as a delinquent posse of southern gentlemen.

 Ponyboy feels an increasing sense of membership in the greaser family, even adopting traits from his older counterparts. He begins to resemble Sodapop physically, and he makes wisecracks reminiscent of Two-Bit's. Dally's leather coat saves Ponyboy's life, signifying that Ponyboy thrives because his elders protect him. Finally, Ponyboy stops acting like a spoiled child and realizes that Darry is firm with him for his own good. Ponyboy realizes that the strength of the group lies in the solidarity of its members, and he begins learning to temper his individual needs for the sake of the group.

  Chapters 7–8

Summary: Chapter 7

*[G]reasers will still be greasers and Socs will still be Socs. Sometimes I think it's the ones in the middle that are really the lucky stiffs. (*The reporters and police interview Ponyboy, Sodapop, and Darry in the hospital waiting room. Sodapop jokes with the reporters and hospital staff, keeping the mood light with his antics. The doctors finally emerge and say that Dally will be fine but that Johnny's back was broken when the roof caved in. Even if Johnny survives, they add, he will be permanently crippled.

 The next morning, Ponyboy is making breakfast when Steve Randle (Sodapop's best friend) and Two-Bit come in with the morning papers. The papers portray Ponyboy, Johnny, and Dally as heroes for rescuing the schoolchildren. They also mention Ponyboy's excellent performance on the track team and in school. The papers mention that the state will charge Johnny with manslaughter and send both Ponyboy and Johnny to juvenile court, from which Ponyboy might be sent to a boys' home. The other boys reassure Ponyboy that his family will stay together. Ponyboy tells them he had his recurring nightmare—which first occurred on the night of his parents' funeral—the previous night. He never remembers the dream, but it makes him wake up in intense panic.

 Ponyboy asks Sodapop about Sandy and learns that she got pregnant and moved to Florida. Her parents refused to let her marry Sodapop because of his age, so Sandy left to live with her grandmother. Sodapop and Darry go to work, and Two-Bit and Ponyboy go to get Cokes at the Tasty Freeze. A blue Mustang pulls up to the restaurant, and in it they see the group of Socs that jumped Ponyboy and Johnny in the park. Ponyboy feels an immediate and intense hatred for them.

 One of the Socs, Marcia's boyfriend, Randy, comes over to Ponyboy. Two-Bit reminds him that no fighting is allowed before the rumble, but Randy says he wants only to talk. He asks Ponyboy why he saved those children and says he would never have thought a greaser could do such a thing. Ponyboy says that it didn't have anything to do with his being a greaser. Sick about the violence and Bob's death, Randy says he does not intend to fight at the rumble. Randy explains that Bob was his best friend, a good guy with a terrible temper and overly indulgent parents. Ponyboy feels reassured by his talk with Randy and realizes that Socs can be human and vulnerable.

 Summary: Chapter 8

*We couldn't get along without him. We needed Johnny as much as he needed the gang. And for the same reason.*

Two-Bit and Ponyboy go to see Johnny and Dally in the hospital. Johnny, weak and pale, whispers that he would like Ponyboy to finish reading Gone with the Wind to him. His mother shows up to visit, but she is a mean-spirited, nagging woman and Johnny refuses to see her. As Ponyboy and Two-Bit leave, she accosts them and blames them for Johnny's condition, and Two-Bit insults her.

 Dally is recovering nicely in the hospital, and for the first time ever Ponyboy feels warmly toward Dally. Dally says that Tim Shepard, the leader of another gang of greasers, came in to talk about the rumble. Dally asks for Two-Bit's black-handled switchblade, and Two-Bit gladly hands over his prized possession without even asking why Dally needs it.

 On the way home, Ponyboy and Two-Bit see Cherry Valance in her Corvette. She says that the Socs have agreed to fight with no weapons. Ponyboy asks her to go see Johnny, but she says she cannot because Johnny killed Bob. She says that Bob had a sweet side and was only violent when drunk, as he was when he beat up Johnny. Ponyboy calls her a traitor, but he quickly forgives her. He asks her if she can see the sunset on the West Side, and when she says she can, he tells her to remember that he can see it on the East Side too.

 Analysis: Chapters 7–8

 Family becomes increasingly important in the second half of the novel—both the biological Curtis family and the makeshift greaser family. Events begin to threaten the Curtis's cohesion, since a good chance exists that that state will take Ponyboy from his brothers and put him in a boys' home. This threat is especially heartrending for the brothers because Ponyboy is finally learning to appreciate Darry. It becomes important to Ponyboy to stay with his brothers as a matter of greaser pride. If the Curtis brothers can stay together, they can prove that greasers have the capability to overcome great odds and be functional, even successful.

 For boys such as Johnny, fellow greasers are far more caring and stable than biological parents, and provide a more trustworthy family. His preference for the greasers and disdain for his dysfunctional family become evident when he allows Ponyboy and Two-Bit to visit him in the hospital but will not see his own mother. He refuses her, not because he is callous or because he wants to hurt her, but rather because he does not consider her an important part of his life. She has failed as a mother, denying him the nurturing that every child needs, and Ponyboy and Two-Bit have provided Johnny with an alternative source of support.

 Ironically, the closer Johnny comes to death, the more he participates in his own life and considers his individual desires. He has long been involved with the greasers and led his life according to their principles, including disliking the Socs. Like a member of any group, however, Johnny needs an identity that is not wholly confined by the group to which he belongs. Being close to death affords Johnny a new perspective on life, one that is different from that of other greasers. He realizes not only that violence is futile but also, more important, that it doesn't have to make up his whole identity.

 Ponyboy's conversations with the two Socs, Randy and Cherry, in this section emphasize his new appreciation of interpersonal connections—all people are individuals, as Ponyboy reminds Randy, while he reminds Cherry that the sunset can be seen just as well from the West Side as from the East Side. This discussion of the sunset illustrates yet another similarity between the two sides: no matter where one lives, whether one is a greaser or a Soc, one can still appreciate beauty. These conversations also allow an earlier topic to resurface, which is the discussion of cycles of nature that Ponyboy introduces through the Robert Frost poem. In this section, Ponyboy realizes that natural cycles, specifically life and death, apply to members of all social groups. This emphasis on commonality and connection occurs just as the characters are preparing for the rumble, their moment of sharpest division.

Chapters 9–10

 Summary: Chapter 9

*Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold. . . .*

Feeling sick before the rumble, Ponyboy swallows five aspirin and struggles to eat his dinner. The boys have bathed and made themselves look “tuff,” and leave for the rumble excitedly. Ponyboy feels a sinking feeling when he sees the other greasers. Tim Shepard's gang and the others seem like genuine hoods. Twenty-two Socs arrive in four carloads to fight the twenty greasers. Darry steps forward to start the fight, and Paul Holden, Darry's high school friend and football teammate, steps up to challenge him. As Paul and Darry circle each other, Dally joins the group. As Dally arrives, the fight breaks out in full. After a long struggle, the greasers win.

 When the rumble ends, Dally and Ponyboy go to the hospital to see Johnny. A policeman stops them, but Ponyboy feigns an injury, and the officer gives them an escort to the hospital. Ponyboy and Dally find Johnny dying. Johnny moans that fighting is useless, tells Ponyboy to “[s]tay gold,” and then dies. Dally is beside himself with grief and runs frantically from the room.

 Summary: Chapter 10

After Johnny's death, Ponyboy wanders alone for hours until a man offers him a ride. The man asks Ponyboy if he is okay and tells him that his head is bleeding. Ponyboy feels vaguely disoriented. At home, he finds the greasers gathered in the living room and tells them that Johnny is dead and that Dally has broken down. Dally calls and says he just robbed a grocery store and is running from the police. The gang rushes out and sees police officers chasing him. Dally pulls out the unloaded gun he carries, and the police shoot him. Dally collapses to the ground, dead. Ponyboy muses that Dally wanted to die. Feeling dizzy and overwhelmed, Ponyboy passes out.

 When Ponyboy wakes, Darry is at his side. Ponyboy learns that he got a concussion when a Soc kicked him in the head during the rumble, and that he has been delirious in bed for three days.

 Analysis: Chapters 9–10

 Underlying the struggle between the Socs and the greasers is the struggle between the instinct to make peace and the social obligation to fight. Hinton turns the rumble into a moral lesson. The fight begins when Darry Curtis and Paul Holden face off; the fact that Darry and Paul were high school friends and football teammates suggests that their rivalry need not exist—that money makes enemies of natural friends. Ponyboy's comment that they used to be friends but now dislike each other because one has to work for a living while the other comes from the leisurely West Side emphasizes the artificial and unnecessary nature of their animosity. While this animosity seems pointless, each gang member who fights still feels a responsibility to his gang to hate the other gang.

 Ponyboy feels this tension within him before the fight. His instincts tell him to skip the rumble, as he knows in his heart that violence won't solve anything. His hesitation after speaking with Randy and his decision to take five aspirin before the fight show that he is emotionally and physically unprepared for the ordeal. Nevertheless, Ponyboy ignores his instincts and goes through with the fight because he wants to please his social group. His participation in the rumble cements his place in the gang; he is no longer a tagalong little brother but rather a fighter in his own right.

 The greasers prepare for the rumble as if preparing for a high school dance. They bathe, do their hair, and dress carefully. The rumble is a social event, an occasion to defend and celebrate one's identity. While other teenagers celebrate their identities by attending dances and parties, the greasers celebrate theirs by fighting. After the fight, however, the glamour of the event wears off. Despite their victory, the greasers understand the uselessness of violence. Nothing has really improved for them: greasers are injured, separation still threatens the Curtis brothers, and Johnny still lies dying.

 Though everyone looks forward to the rumble as a culmination of tension, the rumble actually proves anticlimactic. Immediately after the rumble, Ponyboy and Dally rush to the hospital to see Johnny. Their actions suggests that the rumble is a minor event interrupting their real concerns. The rumble leaves the other greasers depressed too. Victory does not thrill them as they thought it would. The Socs retreat, but the greasers do not cheer. They bleed, double over, and examine their wounds. When Darry announces their victory, his voice is tired, not celebratory.

 The events of these chapters mark the culmination of Ponyboy's trauma. Constant disaster has kept Ponyboy from feeling pain. Over the course of a few days, Ponyboy almost drowns, learns that his friend has committed murder, runs away and hides, saves children from a burning church, and learns that the state may take him away from his brothers. However, the emotions that surround these events have been pushed to the side by both by the constant onslaught of new trauma and by Ponyboy's worries about Johnny and the greaser-Soc rumble. Ponyboy's hospitalization suggests that the string of disasters has ended and that a period of reflection can finally begin.

Chapters 11–12

 Summary: Chapter 11

 Ponyboy is restricted to bed rest for a week after he wakes up from his concussion. He finds a picture of Bob the Soc in Sodapop's high school yearbook. Bob's grin reminds him of Sodapop's. Ponyboy wonders if Bob's parents hate him, saying he prefers their hatred to their pity. Looking at the photograph and remembering conversations with Cherry and Randy, Ponyboy concludes that Bob was cocky, hot-tempered, frightened, and human.

 Randy arrives at the house to talk to Ponyboy and behaves with shocking insensitivity. Not thinking of what Ponyboy has suffered, Randy says he is worried about being associated with the violence. They discuss the hearing scheduled for the next day. Ponyboy, in a delirious state, says that he killed Bob himself and that Johnny is still alive. Darry asks Randy to leave.

 Summary: Chapter 12

 Ponyboy does not have to speak much at the hearing, since his doctor has spoken to the judge about Ponyboy's condition. The judge asks Ponyboy a few gentle questions about his home life and then acquits him of all wrongdoing and allows him to return home with his brothers. After the hearing, Ponyboy becomes detached and depressed. His grades suffer, he loses his coordination, memory, and appetite, and he resumes fighting with Darry. Ponyboy's English teacher, Mr. Syme, says that although Ponyboy is failing, he can raise his grade to a C by writing an outstanding autobiographical theme.

 The next day at lunch, Ponyboy goes to the grocery store with Steve and Two-Bit for candy bars and Cokes. When a group of Socs accosts him, he threatens them with a broken bottle, saying he refuses to take any more of their intimidation. Ponyboy's uncharacteristic show of hostility alarms Steve and Two-Bit, and they warn Ponyboy not to grow hard like Dally was. They are relieved when Ponyboy bends down to pick up the broken glass, not wanting anyone to get a flat tire.

 That night as Ponyboy and Darry fight about Ponyboy's grades, Sodapop runs out of the house, upset that Sandy has returned a letter he wrote her unopened. Darry explains that Sodapop is not the father of Sandy's child and acts puzzled that Sodapop never told Ponyboy. Ponyboy reflects that he probably acted uninterested when Sodapop tried to talk about his problems. Worried, Darry and Ponyboy go find Sodapop. He tells them their constant fighting is tearing him apart. Sobbing, he asks them to try to understand each other and stop fighting. They promise to try. Ponyboy thinks that Sodapop will hold them together.

 The boys run back home. Ponyboy looks at Johnny's copy of *Gone with the Wind.* He finds a handwritten note from Johnny urging him to stay gold and saying that the children's lives were worth his own. Ponyboy realizes that he wants to tell the story of his friends so that other hoodlums will not nurse their anger at the world and ignore the beauty in it. He begins to work on his English theme, starting with the words that begin *The Outsiders*: “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.”

 Analysis: Chapters 11–12

 At first, Ponyboy cannot come to terms with the deaths of Dally and Johnny. He is physically and emotionally immobilized. Even after he recovers from his physical injuries, he feels listless and empty, his grades slip, and his relationship with Darry suffers. Ponyboy's friends worry that he will cope by hardening into an angry hoodlum, a prospect that worries them. We might think that Ponyboy's shows of toughness would be a positive development in Steve and Two-Bit's eyes—displays like the one in the grocery store suggest that Ponyboy is losing his vulnerability to intimidation and thus becoming more valuable in the greaser gang. However, though it is important for a greaser to have a tough exterior, Ponyboy's friends do not want him to become something he is not. Because Johnny has died, Ponyboy is the last one of their group to retain the innocence that each group member lost but remembers with nostalgia. The greasers also worry about Ponyboy's show of toughness because they know that he is not naturally hostile or intimidating. The greasers' concern shows that they place as much importance on individual well-being as on group well-being. The consideration Ponyboy shows in picking up the broken glass from the bottle he uses to intimidate the Socs indicates that his capacity for angry outbursts is less a part of his character than his thoughtfulness and decency.

Ponyboy shows himself to be on the road to recovery when he hashes things out with his brothers. Though Ponyboy still feels the pain of loss, he can finally remember Johnny and Dally without feeling overwhelming denial or anguish. He begins to look at the plight of the greasers and juvenile delinquents with objectivity. He realizes that many boys his age hate the world and feel they must be tough and violent, and he begins to feel that someone should show them the good in the world. Ponyboy's decision to tell the greasers' story in his English theme paper marks his maturation into an emotionally capable young man. Hinton suggests that Ponyboy has found a way to make sense of the preventable violence in his life. Ponyboy's willingness to examine his painful past marks the last stage in his recovery and sets him up to achieve the potential that Darry has long seen in him.

 That the novel's closing lines are an exact repetition of its opening lines symbolically initiates Ponyboy's exploration of his past through memory. With this exploration, recorded in Ponyboy's writing, we, as well as Ponyboy, finally discover a purpose to the seemingly senseless struggle that he has undergone. Hinton's act of ending the novel by circling back to its beginning provides a balanced symmetry to the story's structure. More important, however, Ponyboy's ability to tie the story up so neatly shows that he has dealt with these traumatic events in a healthy way.

 Analysis of Major Characters

 Ponyboy Curtis

 Ponyboy Curtis, the youngest member of the greasers, narrates the novel. Ponyboy theorizes on the motivations and personalities of his friends and describes events in a slangy, youthful voice. Though only fourteen years old, he understands the way his social group functions and the role each group member plays. He sees that Two-Bit is the wisecracker, Darry the natural leader, and Dally the dangerous hood.

 Ponyboy dislikes the Socs, whom we see through his subjective viewpoint. The distorting effects of hatred and group rivalry make his narration less than objective. Ponyboy is young enough to have changeable conceptions of people, however, and over the course of the novel he realizes that Socs have problems just as greasers do. He also comes to see that Socs are even similar to the greasers in some ways.

 Ponyboy has a literary bent, which Hinton uses to show that poverty does not necessarily mean boorishness or lack of culture, and that gang members are not always delinquents. Ponyboy identifies with Pip, the impoverished protagonist of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations,* cites the Robert Frost poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” and introduces Johnny to the southern gentlemen of Margaret Mitchell's Southern epic, *Gone with the Wind.* With such an awareness of literary protagonists, Ponyboy sees himself as he is, as both character and narrator. He takes on the narrator's work of recounting events and the character's work of growing and changing as a result of those events. The novel is not just a story of gang rivalry; it is an account of Ponyboy's development.

 Johnny Cade

 Johnny Cade is a vulnerable sixteen-year-old greaser in a group defined by toughness and a sense of invincibility. He comes from an abusive home, and he takes to the greasers because they are his only reliable family. While Johnny needs the greasers, the greasers also need Johnny, for protecting him gives them a sense of purpose and justifies their violent measures. When Johnny, little and vulnerable, suffers at the hands of the Socs, the greasers feel justified in their hatred of the rival gang.

 Passive and quiet, Johnny is the principal catalyst for the major events of the novel. He stands up to Dally at the drive-in and tells him to stop harassing the two Soc girls, Cherry and Marcia. Johnny's intervention on the girls' behalf pleases the girls, and they talk and walk with the greasers. This interaction between female Socs and male greasers sparks the anger of the Soc boys and motivates them to attack Johnny and Ponyboy. Ultimately, Johnny's small acts of courage lead to murder, death, and heroic rescue. But Johnny ends by advocating against gang violence, stating that he would gladly sacrifice his life for the lives of little children. Although a gentle boy, he has a profound impact with his startling, persistent demand for peace. His courage in rescuing the children from the burning church and his subsequent death as a result of injuries sustained in the rescue make him a martyr. Ponyboy's decision to write the story that becomes *The Outsiders* ensures that Johnny's bravery will not be forgotten.

 Cherry Valance

Before Cherry Valance enters the narrative, Ponyboy paints the conflict between the greasers and the Socs as irreconcilable. The introduction of Cherry, however, suggests that individual friendships can chip away at group hatreds. Cherry gets along perfectly well with some of the greasers. She likes Ponyboy and Johnny because they treat her politely. Dally's rude antics do not amuse her. Her disenchantment with Dally's behaviour suggests that she talks to Ponyboy and Johnny not because she is slumming and their greaser identity fascinates her, but rather because she likes them as individuals. For a short while at least, she cares more about how each boy behaves than about his West Side or East Side address.

 Cherry is not just a sweet, simple girl. She finds herself sexually attracted to Dally, who is crass and unrefined but also sexy and charismatic. Despite all her attraction to the greasers, moreover, she is not completely free of group prejudice. She tells Ponyboy she probably will not say hello to him at school, acknowledging that she respects social divisions. Although Cherry plays a relatively small role in the novel, the ambiguity of her sympathies gives us something to which we can relate. She mirrors our own perspective as someone close to the action who is nevertheless an outsider and who does not always fully understand other characters' emotions and motivations.

 Themes, Motifs & Symbols

 Themes

 Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor

 The Outsiders tells the story of two groups of teenagers whose bitter rivalry stems from socioeconomic differences. However, Hinton suggests, these differences in social class do not necessarily make natural enemies of the two groups. The greasers and Socs share some things in common. Cherry Valance, a Soc, and Ponyboy Curtis, a greaser, discuss their shared love of literature, popular music, and sunsets, transcending—if only temporarily—the divisions that feed the feud between their respective groups. Their harmonious conversation suggests that shared passions can fill in the gap between rich and poor. This potential for agreement marks a bright spot in the novel's gloomy prognosis that the battle between the classes is a long-lasting one. Over the course of the novel, Ponyboy begins to see the pattern of shared experience. He realizes that the hardships that greasers and Socs face may take different practical forms, but that the members of both groups—and youths everywhere—must inevitably come to terms with fear, love, and sorrow.

 Honour Among the Lawless

 The idea of honourable action appears throughout the novel, and it works as an important component of the greaser behavioural code. Greasers see it as their duty, Ponyboy says, to stand up for each other in the face of enemies and authorities. In particular, we see acts of honourable duty from Dally Winston, a character who is primarily defined by his delinquency and lack of refinement. Ponyboy informs us that once, in a show of group solidarity, Dally let himself be arrested for a crime that Two-Bit had committed. Furthermore, when discussing Gone with the Wind, Johnny says that he views Dally as a Southern gentleman, as a man with a fixed personal code of behaviour. Statements like Johnny's, coupled with acts of honourable sacrifice throughout the narrative, demonstrate that courtesy and propriety can exist even among the most lawless of social groups.

 The Treacherousness of Male-Female Interactions

 As hostile and dangerous as the greaser-Soc rivalry becomes, the boys from each group have the comfort of knowing how their male friends will react to their male enemies. When Randy and Bob approach Ponyboy and Johnny, everyone involved knows to expect a fight of some sort. It is only when the female members of the Soc contingent start to act friendly toward the greasers that animosities blur and true trouble starts brewing. Even on the greaser side, Sodapop discovers female unreliability when he finds out that his girlfriend is pregnant with another man's child. With these plot elements, Hinton conveys the idea that cross-gender interaction creates unpredictable results. This message underscores the importance of male bonding in the novel to the creation of unity and structure.

 Motifs

 Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Literature

 Literary references occur throughout The Outsiders, helping us understand how the characters in the novel view themselves and those around them. Ponyboy first alludes to a work of literature in Chapter 1, when he compares himself to Pip from Charles Dickens's Great Expectations. Ponyboy identifies with Pip because he, like Pip, is orphaned, impoverished, and struggling to make sense of the world. Additionally Ponyboy and Johnny put special emphasis on Robert Frost's poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” which helps them understand that growing up and facing reality is a necessary part of life. Finally, Johnny likens Dally to a Southern gentleman in Gone with the Wind. Having this idealized vision of Dally makes Johnny able to understand him.

 Literature not only creates a bond between Ponyboy and the other characters, as when he discusses books with Cherry and reads to Johnny, but it also creates a cyclic premise for the narrative itself. We find out at the novel's end that the narrative of The Outsiders is in fact an autobiographical work that Ponyboy is writing in order to pass his English class. This revelation confirms the importance of literature in the story as a means of connecting with others.

 Eye Shape and Colour

 Though Hinton gives thorough physical descriptions of all her characters, she places particular importance on their eyes. Characters' eyes represent key facets of their personalities. For example, Darry and Dally—the two boys with whom Ponyboy feels the least comfortable—have icy blue eyes. Dally's eyes, in particular, are narrow. The narrator considers these two characters to be hard, even heartless, and the narrowness and cool hues of their eyes reflect their invulnerability. Hinton repeatedly defines Johnny Cade, on the other hand, by his wide, brown eyes. In correspondence with his eye shape and color, Johnny is generally nervous, gentle, and vulnerable to attack.

 Ponyboy's Losses of Consciousness

 During the second half of the novel, beginning with the scene at the burning church, Ponyboy loses consciousness multiple times. It might seem strange at first to have a narrator slip in and out of mental clarity and thus miss out on entire spans of plot development. However, it makes sense that Hinton would distance her narrator temporarily in this manner, as this gives us, as well as Ponyboy, a needed rest from the intense action. This device also allows for events to be recounted after they happen, so that Ponyboy can sift through unnecessary details.

 Symbols

 Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Two-Bit's Switchblade

 Two-Bit's switchblade is his most prized possession and, in several ways, represents the disregard for authority for which greasers traditionally pride themselves. First of all, the blade is stolen. Second, it represents a sense of the individual power that comes with the potential to commit violence. This symbolism surfaces most clearly when Dally borrows the blade from Two-Bit and uses it to break out of the hospital to join his gang at the rumble. It is fitting that Two-Bit finally loses the blade when the police confiscate it from Dally's dead body. The loss of the weapon, at this point, becomes inextricably linked with the loss of Dally—a figure who embodies individual power and authority.

 Cars

 Cars represent the Socs power and the greasers' vulnerability. Because their parents can afford to buy them their “tuff” cars, the Socs have increased mobility and protection. The greasers, who move mostly on foot, are physically vulnerable in comparison to the Socs. Still, greasers like Darry, Sodapop, and Steve do have contact with automobiles—they repair them. We can interpret this interaction with cars positively or negatively. On one hand, it symbolizes how the greasers have a more direct and well-rounded experience than the Socs with the gritty realities of life. On the other hand, the fact that the greasers must service and care for Soc possessions demonstrates that the Socs have the power to oppress the greasers.

 Bob's Rings

 Bob Sheldon's rings function similarly to the Socs' cars. Throughout literature, rings and jewellery have been traditional symbols of wealth. The rings in this story represent the physical power that accompanies wealth. By using his rings as combative weapons, Bob takes advantage of his economic superiority over Ponyboy and the other greasers, using his wealth to injure his opponents.

Greaser Hair

The greasers cannot afford rings, cars, or other physical trappings of power that the Socs enjoy. Consequently, they must resort to more affordable markers of identity. By wearing their hair in a specific style, greasers distinguish themselves from other social groups. Conservative cultural values of the 1960s called for men to keep their hair short, and the greaser style is a clear transgression of this social convention. It is not only distinctive, but, as a physical characteristic, this hair is truly an organic part of the greaser persona. When the Socs jump Ponyboy at the beginning of the novel, they ask him if he wants a haircut and threaten to cut off his hair. By doing so, they would rob him of his identity.