

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Outsiders

by  
S.E. Hinton

### Book Information

S.E. Hinton, The Outsiders  
Quiz Number: 381  
Viking, 1967  
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188 Pages  
Book Level: 4.7  
Interest Level: UG

An impassioned teenage author tells it like it is with the long-haired kids from the wrong side of the tracks.

**Award:** ABA Children's Book Council; Bilby Award; Margaret A. Edwards Award; SLJ Best Book; State Award

**Topics:** Community Life, Violence; Family Life, Orphans; Power Lessons AR, Grade 8; Power Lessons Vocabulary, Grades 7 & Up; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Take a Stand: Leadership; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Recommended Reading, Oprah's Book Club - Kids Reading List; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks

### Main Characters

Bob a Soc who once beat up Johnny

Cherry Valance a rich Soc who befriends Ponyboy, but always went for the boys who got in trouble

Dallas 'Dally' Winston probably the toughest member of the greaser "gang"

Darrel 'Darry' Curtis Ponyboy's oldest brother, who quit school to get a job and take care of Soda and Ponyboy after their parents died; he rarely smiles and seems cold and uncaring

Johnny Cade a greaser whom everyone likes but seems like "a little dark puppy who had been kicked too many times"

Ponyboy Curtis a fourteen-year-old boy from the poor side of town who lives with his older brothers, Soda and Darry

Soda Curtis Ponyboy's older brother who is well-liked and always seems to be happy-go-lucky  
Steve Randle and Two-Bit Mathews two more greasers who hang out with Ponyboy and his brothers

### Vocabulary

**gallant** nobly chivalrous and often self-sacrificing

**ornery** having an irritable disposition

**premonition** anticipation of an event without conscious reason

**reformatory** a penal institution to which young or first offenders are sent for training and reformation

### Synopsis

Ponyboy Curtis comes from the wrong side of the tracks. He has lived with his brothers since the death of their parents some years earlier. Ponyboy and his greaser friends, Johnny and Dally go to the drive-in one night where they meet some rich Soc girls who had left their boyfriends when the boys started drinking. Ponyboy gets to know one girl, Cherry Valance, and through his conversation with her, he begins to realize that his world might not be so different from hers.

Later Cherry's boyfriend, Bob, and some Socs find her and her girlfriend with Ponyboy and Johnny. After taking the girls home, Bob decides to go out looking for the greasers. Johnny is out because he doesn't want to go home to his abusive parents, and Ponyboy is out because his brother hit him for coming home so late. The Socs find them, and one of them begins to drown Ponyboy in a fountain. Johnny reacts by stabbing and killing Bob. The other Socs flee, and Johnny and Ponyboy seek Dally's help.

Dally sends them to an abandoned church in a nearby town. There Johnny cuts and bleaches Ponyboy's hair to disguise him, and the two spend the week hiding out from the police. Dally eventually arrives to tell them that the police think they are in Texas, and that there is a big war planned between the greasers and the Socs. Johnny then decides he

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will turn himself in to the police, but before he gets the chance, he becomes a hero by saving the lives of some children who are trapped inside the burning church.

The greasers go through with the big rumble and they defeat the Socs. Dally and Ponyboy rush to the hospital to see Johnny just before he dies. Dally cracks because he can't handle it, and rushes out into the night. Ponyboy, dazed and hurt, eventually makes it home. Dally is later shot down by the police, who thought he had a loaded gun.

Ponyboy's life then spins out of control until one day Soda cracks under the pressure of trying to keep Darry and Ponyboy from fighting. Ponyboy finally sees how much this hurts Soda and decides to try to stop fighting with Darry. After thinking back over all that has happened, Ponyboy comes up with the subject for the theme he needs to write in order to pass his English class. He is going to write about Johnny.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Ponyboy finally understood that Darry yelled at him because he cared about him and wanted to see him get to college and make something of himself. What are some ways your parents, guardians, friends, siblings, etc. show that they care about you?

*They make you do your homework. They give you a safe place to stay. They buy you gifts.*

### Literary Analysis

Though the setting of the story is never directly stated, readers can guess the general time and place in which the story was set. What clues help the reader determine the setting?

*The story seems to take place in the 1960s, judging by the description of clothing and hairstyles. References were made to the Beatles and Elvis, and a movie starring Paul Newman. When Ponyboy and Johnny were hiding, Dally told police he thought they had gone to Texas.*

### Inferential Comprehension

By reading between the lines, the reader can determine that Soda still wanted to marry Sandy even though she was pregnant with someone else's child. Why do think he wanted to do this?

*He loved her and didn't want her to be alone.*

### Constructing Meaning

Ponyboy thought he was different from the other greasers because he read books. How did reading books make him different from the others?

*He learned what life was like for people in other places. He did well in school. He had the respect of some of his teachers, despite his looks and out of class reputation.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Literary Features** *The Outsiders* is a story about one boy struggling to understand who he is and where he fits in the world. He comes to understand that not everyone in the opposing gang, the Socs, has an easy life. He learns that the Socs and the greasers are not as different as he once thought, and he eventually hopes he can find a way to make the outside world understand his world. Compare this story to other stories of struggles between opposing groups such as *West Side Story* or *Romeo and Juliet*. Read one of these plays and compare and contrast the themes and lessons learned with *The Outsiders*.

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**Understanding Characterization** Ponyboy shared his love of reading and poetry with the readers. He told us that he was the only greaser who enjoyed these things. Discuss how these pleasures made Ponyboy different from the other members of his group. Create some poetry of your own and share what it means to you, read some poetry aloud to others and discuss the imagery of the poem, or share with the class one pastime, hobby or activity that sets you apart from others and why you enjoy it.

**Understanding Characterization** One main lesson that Ponyboy learned in *The Outsiders* was that there are problems in the lives of all people, regardless of social class or standing. Another lesson was that everyone has hopes and dreams. In the end, Ponyboy recognized these ideas and decided to write his theme about his group of friends in the hope that he could help others understand them. Choose two ethnic or social classes in your community. Make a list of ways these groups are the same and ways they differ from each other. Swap stories of your life with a classmate and compare and contrast your lives.

**Making Predictions** Ponyboy's parents had died a few months before this story takes place. Given what Ponyboy told us about his parents, discuss how things would have been different for Ponyboy and his brothers if they had not died. List the crucial events in the story and consider how they would have either ended differently or not occurred at all. Predict what will happen to Ponyboy in the future and consider whether Ponyboy's future would be different or the same if his parents were still alive. Think about your own life; discuss ways it would be different if you did or did not have your parents around to help you.