

The Outsiders Test Review

for Chapters One – Six

Characters in *The Outsiders*

Understanding the descriptions and motives of the many characters in *The Outsiders* is central to understanding this novel. On the test, students must identify the following characters by matching their names to their description. Students should keep in mind which characters are identified by their real names and which are known by their nicknames.

- Ponyboy Curtis: The **narrator** and **protagonist** of the story whose parents have died in a car accident
- Sodapop: Ponyboy's good-natured, good-looking older brother
- Darry: Ponyboy's oldest brother who is raising Ponyboy.
- Dally: a tough Greaser whose real name is Dallas Winston
- Two-Bit: A comical Greaser who is known for shoplifting
- Steve: A Greaser who works at a gas station and is best friends with Sodapop
- Johnny: a serious and sensitive Greaser who sees the Greasers as his only family
- Cherry: a Soc cheerleader who befriends Ponyboy

Literary Elements in *The Outsiders*

Students should be able to define and give examples of the following literary elements in *The Outsiders*.

- **Point of view:** This story is told in first person point of view. Students can easily identify that the narrator is also a central character in the story because he uses the pronoun "I."
- **Narrator:** the person who conveys the action of and often provides commentary about the story. Fourteen year old Ponyboy Curtis is the narrator of *The Outsiders*.

- **Flashback:** occurs when a story begins at one point and then transports readers back to an earlier time of the story. This novel flashes back to previous events in the story to help readers understand the characters.
- **Symbolism:** occurs when one concrete object represents itself as well as something else that is often more abstract, such as an emotion.
- **Theme:** this is a central purpose of a novel which often reveals a lesson or observation about life; an important theme in the story is that friendship can be as strong a bond as family.
- **Foreshadowing:** hints at future events in the story.

The Novel at a Glance

- *The Outsiders* is a popular young adult novel about gang conflicts, the tragedy caused by violence, and the struggle for personal identity. The novel is enormously popular with students and has become something of a contemporary classic.
- **Point of View:** First-person narration.
- **Setting:** Oklahoma town during the 1960s.
- **Protagonist:** Ponyboy Curtis, the youngest of three orphaned brothers; member of a gang called the Greasers.
- **Conflicts:** Internal conflicts within Ponyboy in relation to his brothers, to gang violence, and to his own identity; external conflicts between the Greasers and the Socs, a rival gang, and between the Greasers and the police.
- **Resolution:** After three boys have died, one heroically, Ponyboy Curtis comes to see the pointlessness of violence, to appreciate his older brothers, and to realize that he *can* control his own life.
- **External conflicts** are resolved in a series of violent events.
- **Themes:** It is not only the circumstances of life that determine one's path or define one's identity. Answering violence with violence does not resolve problems.

What are two literary devices in *The Outsiders* and how is each one developed?

The use of description/detail is one device used very effectively in the novel. The detail is spare in volume, but makes a vivid impact when used. An example would be when

the church was burning, and the description of the cinders blowing in the air is truly visual. The description, involving the use of slang, is also effective. Referring to groups of people, as "soc" or "greaser", gives the reader a lot of information on lifestyles, socio-economic status, and beliefs just by their label.

Allusion is what Ponyboy uses to relate a situation without an extensive amount of description. He will refer to specific literature to compare the situation, and this gives the reader an idea of it without two pages of dialogue or narration to describe it.

KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The Outsiders is set in a large, unnamed town in the United States. It is about a gang of teenage boys who are called the Greasers. They live on the east side of the town, also known as the wrong side of town; the eastside neighborhood is described in graphic detail. The story is set in the 1960's and relates the incidents that take place over a few days. After killing Bob, Pony and Johnny take shelter in an abandoned church in Windrixville. After it catches fire and burns down, they return to their hometown, where Johnny dies in a hospital.

CONFLICT

Protagonist

Pony Curtis is the teenage narrator and protagonist of the novel. When his parents were killed in a car accident, Darry, his twenty-year-old brother, began to provide for him. He resents Darry's bullying manner, not realizing that he does so because he loves him and wants him to make something of himself. Pony belongs to an eastside gang of poor teenagers, called the Greasers; their rivals are the Socs, the rich kids living on the west side of town.

Antagonist

Pony's antagonist is his status in life. Poor and from the wrong side of town, he gets no breaks in life, even though he is a good student and studies hard. He joins the Greasers because it is the thing to do if you live on the east side of town. Their rivals are the Socs, a gang of rich, spoiled kids living on the west side of town. The Socs constantly pick fights with the Greasers, and Bob, one of the Socs, attacks Johnny and Pony because they have been friendly with Cherry. Johnny kills Bob in self-defense, and he and Pony go into hiding in a church in Windrixville. When the church catches on fire, Johnny and Pony try to save the children trapped inside. Johnny is seriously injured during the rescue and dies a few days later in a hospital.

Dally, who was Johnny's best friend, is completely shattered by his death. Crazy with grief, he robs a store and then threatens the police with an unloaded gun. As a result, he is killed. Now Pony has lost two friends. He falls sick, becomes delirious, tries to deny Johnny's death, and begins to fail in school.

Climax

The climax occurs when Pony reads the letter that Johnny has written to him before his death. Johnny encourages his friend to "stay gold" - to look for the sunsets and good things in life. He tells Pony that if he tries, he will be able to make something worthwhile out of his life. Reading the letter is the turning point in Pony's life.

Outcome

The novel ends as a tragic comedy. Even though Bob, Johnny, and Dally have needlessly perished, Pony overcomes his problems,

largely due to Johnny's letter of encouragement. He reconciles with Darry, finally understanding how much his older brother loves and cares for him. He also accepts that he does not have to be an outsider or a Greaser for the rest of his life. In order to seek help and understanding for underprivileged children like himself, Pony's mission becomes to tell others about the immense obstacles that stand in the way of success for teenagers from the wrong side of town. The novel, therefore, ends on a note of hope and optimism.

THEMES

Major Themes

The major theme of the novel revolves around the purposelessness of any gang of teenagers. The book centers on the foolish gang rivalry existing between the Socs, the rich kids from the west side of town, and the Greasers, the poor kids from the east side.

Pony, the protagonist of the story, is bitter about the fact that the wealthy Socs have nice cars, fancy clothes, and girlfriends; things are simply easier for them than for the Greasers. Because the Socs are convinced that they are better, they constantly pick on members of the Greasers, who fight back. During one squabble, Bob, one of the Socs, is murdered by Johnny in self-defense. Then Johnny, while hiding out in a church, is killed while trying to rescue children from the burning building. In reaction to Johnny's death, Dally, his best friend, goes on a rampage. He robs a store and points an unloaded gun at the police; as a result, he is shot and killed. Because of the needless gang fighting, three teenagers are killed in the novel, clearly pointing out the negative aspect of belonging to a gang. Hinton is obviously trying to warn the reader against participation in any gang.

The novel deals with the needless pain and violence caused by gang rivalry. The entire book centers on the animosity that exists between the Socs, the rich kids from the west side of town, and the Greasers, the impoverished teenagers from the east side. Because the Socs think they are superior, they jump on the Greasers at every opportunity. Before the book actually begins, they have beaten up Johnny Cade, the meekest Greaser, for absolutely no reason. Then in the first chapter of the book, the Socs jump Pony, the main character, as he walks home from the movie theater alone. Such needless violence leads directly to the death of Bob and indirectly to the deaths of Johnny and Dally.

When Pony, Johnny and Two-Bit befriend two Socy girls, Cherry and Marcia, there is some hope that with increased interaction between the two gangs, their hostility will decrease. In fact, Pony and Cherry find that they can talk easily with each other and have a lot in common, including their love for sunsets. But this friendship is not allowed to develop because the Socs resent their girls fraternizing with the Greasers. As a result, Bob and a few other Socs attack Pony and Johnny to teach them a lesson. During the fighting, Johnny kills Bob in self-defense. Pony and Johnny then hide in an abandoned church in Windrixville. They rise above themselves and heroically rescue some children from the burning church. During the rescue, Johnny is seriously wounded when a burning beam falls on his back; he is put in the hospital and is not expected to live.

In spite of the fact that Johnny is close to death and Dally is injured, the tension between the Socs and the Greasers increase. The Socs want to have a rumble to settle the score about Bob. In the fight that ensues, the Greasers are joined by the Shepard and Brumly gangs; they easily defeat the Socs. But the violence is still not ended. When Johnny dies, Dally goes crazy. He pounds the wall, rushes out of the

hospital, robs a store, and points his unloaded gun at the police. As a result, he is shot and killed while his friend watch in horror. Pony is so upset by the violence and the loss of another friend that he is delirious for more than three days. Fortunately, Johnny's letter, written before his death, makes an impact on Pony, and he vows to rise about his life of gangs and violence and promises to help other underprivileged children. Like Johnny, he has realized the pain and futility of gang rivalry.

Minor Themes

Related to the major theme of the book is the theme that a teenager can rise above his circumstances through hard work, patience, and determination. Pony is the proof of this theme. Even though he is born into poverty, loses his parents in a car accident at an early age, and participates in the Greasers, by the end of the book, he is determined to better his plight in life, largely due to the encouragement he receives from the deceased Johnny in a letter. At the close of the novel, Pony wants to tell the world that underprivileged children need to have some breaks in order to get ahead and need to be judged for who they are, not by how they look or how they dress. Hinton definitely convinces the reader that Pony, because of his intelligence and determination, will rise above the poverty and gang life that he was born into.

A minor theme is that dysfunctional families place an unbelievable hardship on the children. Johnny has the look of a kicked puppy, for he has been repeatedly beaten by his father and totally ignored by his mother. Dally has no family that cares about him, and he has spent his life in and out of jail since the young age of ten. Darry has had to leave school and work two jobs in order to support Soda and Pony after the death of his parents. Two-Bit's mother must work as a barmaid to support him and his sister, because his father has

deserted them. Steve hates his father, who neglects him. All of these teenagers suffer from neglect and a lack of love; as a result, they join a gang in order to have a sense of belonging.

Another minor theme is the injustice of judging people on appearances. The Socs get by with all of their meanness because they appear normal; they live on the right side of town, have plenty of money, dress nicely, have short hair, and drive expensive cars. As a result, they are never blamed for anything bad. In contrast, the Greasers are considered to be hoods, because they are poor, they live on the wrong side of town, their hair is long and greased, and they wear strange clothing. As a result, they are blamed for everything. In truth, it is the Socs who always start the trouble throughout the book.

MOOD

When the story opens, the mood is bitter and rebellious. Pony and the other Greasers resent the fact that the Socs have lots of money, nice cars, fancy clothes, and many girlfriends. In contrast, they are poor and must work extremely hard for everything they have. In addition, society is prejudiced against them because of their clothes, long hair, and greasy appearance. In the middle of the novel, the mood becomes increasingly angry. The Greasers are tired of the Socs always picking on them, and the Socs are furious about the Greasers hanging out with some of "their girls." As a result, the Socs jump Pony and Johnny. In self-defense Johnny kills Bob, one of the Socs.

The mood then becomes one of terror. Pony and Johnny are scared for their own safety and fear the police. Upon Dally's advice, they hide in an abandoned church and worry about being found. The mood then switches to great sadness, for Johnny, in trying to rescue

the children when the church catches on fire, is killed himself. Dally then gets himself foolishly shot by the police, leaving Pony with two less friends. By the end of the novel, however, the mood has some degree of hope. Pony is determined to rise above his past. He adopts a new mission in life, to tell the world about the problems and deprivations of underprivileged children, like himself. It is obvious that in the end, Hinton is very sympathetic towards the plight of Pony and the Greasers.

Main Characters (in order of appearance)

Ponyboy Curtis, fourteen, the first-person narrator, a member of a gang called the Greasers. He enjoys movies and books, and is an A student and distance runner.

Darrel (Darry) Curtis, twenty, Ponyboy's brother, a star football player who had to abandon college plans in order to support himself and his brothers when their parents were killed in an auto accident.

Sodapop Curtis, sixteen, Ponyboy's happy-go-lucky brother, a high school dropout who works at a gas station. He likes drag races, poker, and fighting.

Greasers, a working-class East Side gang; the members wear their hair long and slick it back with oil.

Socs (Socials), well-dressed, neatly barbered, wealthy West Side gang.

Dallas (Dally) Winston, seventeen, the toughest Greaser; cold, mean, and wild; from New York.

Two-Bit (Keith) Mathews, eighteen, the oldest Greaser; treats life as a joke. He is famous for shoplifting and for owning a black-handled switchblade knife that he never uses. He likes fights and girls and attends school for kicks.

Johnny (Johnnycake) Cade, sixteen, small, dark, quiet, and soft-spoken. He is the youngest Greaser except for his best friend, Ponyboy.

Marcia, a dark-haired Soc girl with a sense of humor.

Cherry Valance, a redheaded Soc girl, a cheerleader, who tries to see more than one point of view.

Randy Adderson and **Bob Sheldon**, Marcia's and Cherry's boyfriends. They are Soc boys who tend to attack Greasers when their own group is larger. Bob is killed; Randy chooses to get out of a life of violence.

Plot

Chapter 1.

As Ponyboy Curtis is walking home from a movie, five members of a gang called the Socs pull up in a Corvair and jump him. He is rescued by his brothers and members of his own gang, the Greasers. With this opener, the **first-person narrator**, Ponyboy, introduces us to the **characters** and their **setting**. We learn who the Greasers and Socs are. We also learn that Ponyboy loves movies and books and that he feels close to his middle brother, Sodapop, but believes he cannot please his big brother, Darry. We notice hints of **conflicts** and problems to come: The Socs have already beaten up a younger member of the Greasers, Johnny Cade, and the orphaned Curtis brothers will be allowed to stay together only as long as they do not get into trouble.

Chapter 2.

We learn more about the **characters** and the gangs. Dally, Johnny, and Ponyboy sneak into the section of a drive-in movie theater reserved for people who have not arrived in cars. Dally harasses two Soc girls who are sitting there because they refused to stay with their drunken Soc boyfriends. Eventually Dally leaves. Ponyboy and Johnny strike up conversations with the girls, Marcia and Cherry, and Two-Bit joins them. In a **flashback** we learn that Johnny is habitually scared because his father beats him and because four Socs driving a blue Mustang left him seriously injured four months earlier.

Chapter 3.

Suspense builds when Soc boys in a blue Mustang confront Two-Bit, Johnny, and Ponyboy, who are walking Marcia and Cherry to Two-Bit's house so that he can drive the girls home, across town. We find out that Bob is the Soc who beat up Johnny four months earlier. A fight is averted when Cherry and Marcia agree to let the Soc boys drive them home. Ponyboy and Johnny stay out so late that when Ponyboy gets home, his brother Darry slaps him. Believing that Darry hates him, Ponyboy runs back outside to Johnny.

Chapter 4.

The Greaser-Soc **conflict** escalates to **crisis**. In the middle of the night in the town park, the Soc boys again confront Johnny and Ponyboy. A tall boy holds Ponyboy's head in the cold park fountain so long that he almost drowns. Then Ponyboy finds himself gasping on the pavement, and the Socs gone except for Bob, who lies dead. Fearing for Ponyboy's life, Johnny has stabbed Bob. Ponyboy and Johnny go to Dally Winston for money, a gun, and a plan. At Dally's direction, they hop a freight train to the next town and walk to an abandoned church that Dally has told them about. On reaching the church, Ponyboy has a premonition, a creepy feeling about the church that **foreshadows** more trouble.

Chapter 5.

Johnny buys supplies in the nearby town, and he and Ponyboy disguise themselves by cutting their hair and bleaching Ponyboy's. For four days they eat bread and baloney, play poker, read the novel *Gone with the Wind*, enjoy the view and the sunrise, and talk about Robert Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay." Dally Winston, who has tricked the police into thinking that the boys are headed for Texas, arrives on the fifth day. He brings a letter from Sodapop Curtis that speaks about Darry's concern for Ponyboy. Dally takes

the boys into town for a full meal and tells them about the **complications** that have arisen from the killing: All-out Soc-Greaser warfare is developing, and Cherry Valance is acting as a spy among the Socs on behalf of the Greasers because she feels the killing was her fault.

Chapter 6.

Johnny proposes turning himself in, since Cherry and Ponyboy will testify that he acted in self-defense. Dally, worried that jail time will harden Johnny, tries to dissuade him. The story reaches a **climax** when the trio return to the hide-out. They find the old church ablaze; several eight-year-olds who were attending a school picnic are trapped inside. Believing they may have started the fire by leaving a cigarette burning, Ponyboy and Johnny break a window, locate the children, and drop them through another window to safety. As the roof of the church caves in, Ponyboy escapes but Dally burns his arm reaching into the building to drag out the badly injured Johnny. In the ambulance, the schoolteacher, Jerry Wood, is impressed with the three of them and asks Ponyboy if they are “professional heroes.” In the hospital, Ponyboy awakens to see his brother Darry crying. Ponyboy realizes that Darry’s frequent scolding is his way of expressing his love.

Chapter 7.

Reporters interview the Curtis brothers and the headline says of Johnny, Ponyboy, and Dally, “Juvenile Delinquents Turn Heroes.” Dally is expected to recover from his arm burns, but Johnny remains in critical condition with a broken spine, third-degree burns, and severe shock. Ponyboy is released from the hospital and goes home with his brothers. A rumble, or gang fight, between the Socs and the Greasers is planned for the next night. In the morning his brothers go to work and Ponyboy spends the day with Two-Bit. They run into

the Soc boy Randy Adderson, who tells Ponyboy he is tired of all the fighting and plans to leave town. Randy describes the dead boy, Bob, as his best friend, and as someone so spoiled that all he really wanted was someone to say “No” to him. Ponyboy at last understands what Cherry meant when she said earlier, “Things are rough all over.”

Chapter 8.

Two-Bit and Ponyboy visit the hospital. They find Johnny in bad shape, but Dally recovering. Dally’s concern for Johnny and the fact that he asks Two-Bit for his prized jet-handled switchblade **foreshadows** trouble. Cherry, waiting by the vacant lot in her Corvette, tells Two-Bit and Ponyboy that the Socs will play fair at the rumble, using no weapons, as requested by the Greasers. She and Ponyboy quarrel, but make up; they realize that they see the same sunset.

Chapter 9.

Suspense builds. The Curtis brothers spruce up, Sodapop and Ponyboy grease their hair for the rumble, and the brothers joke around with other gang members. Even Ponyboy is more excited than afraid. At the vacant lot they are joined by two other gangs, their allies in this fight. Feeling the tension, Ponyboy takes a clear look at his gang’s allies and thinks, “We’re greasers, but not hoods, and we don’t belong with this bunch of future convicts.” The cleanshaven Socs arrive. Darry Curtis for the Greasers and Paul Holden for the Socs, once football buddies, circle each other. The rumble begins just as Dally Winston, who has left the hospital, runs up. Ponyboy, still sick from the effects of the fire, is stunned by a kick in the head. The rumble ends, the Socs run, and Dally drags Ponyboy to the hospital to see Johnny. They make it just in time to see him die. Dally, who has already been raving, is devastated by

Johnny's death. He disappears from the hospital, leaving Ponyboy behind.

Chapter 10.

Ponyboy wanders the streets, dazed, until a stranger drives him home to his brothers and his gang. Dally calls: He has just robbed a grocery store and is evading the police. Ponyboy staggers along behind the gang to the vacant lot, where Dally and the police arrive at the same time. Dally deliberately provokes police fire by pulling a gun that Ponyboy knows is not loaded. Dally dies with a grin, wanting to be dead, since Johnny meant everything to him. Ponyboy faints. He wakes up a few days later to discover that he has been very ill.

Chapter 11.

Still in bed recovering from a concussion and fever, Ponyboy pages through a yearbook and begins to see Bob, the dead Soc, as a real person. Randy Adderson comes by and explains that at the hearing the next day he will tell the truth about Bob's death. Ponyboy starts raving, claiming to have killed Bob himself, saying that Johnny had nothing to do with it and that Johnny is still alive.

Chapter 12.

The various plot lines **resolve**. Before the hearing, Ponyboy's doctor has a long talk with the judge. During the hearing, the Socs and the Curtis brothers tell the truth, except that Ponyboy can't understand why everyone says Johnny killed Bob. The judge, apparently warned that Ponyboy is out of touch with reality, asks Ponyboy only about school and life with his brothers. The judge dismisses the case and lets the brothers continue to live together. Ponyboy returns to school but is unable to concentrate and begins to fail English. His teacher offers him the chance to improve his grade by writing a

personal-experience essay. One day some Socs approach Ponyboy at school, but he drives them off with a broken Pepsi bottle. He feels empty inside and works hard to continue feeling nothing. He does not realize how worried his brothers are about him and how much his arguments with Darry tear apart their middle brother, Sodapop—until the day he recognizes that Sodapop has problems of his own. After that, he can admit to himself that Johnny is dead and that it was Johnny who killed Bob. Opening the copy of *Gone with the Wind* that Johnny left to him, Ponyboy finds a note in which Johnny explains that he now truly understands Robert Frost’s poem: “He meant you’re gold when you’re a kid, like green.” Johnny wants Ponyboy to know that he still has time to become whatever he wants. At last Ponyboy is able to write a paper based on his own experience—a theme that begins with the opening words of this novel: “When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness . . .”