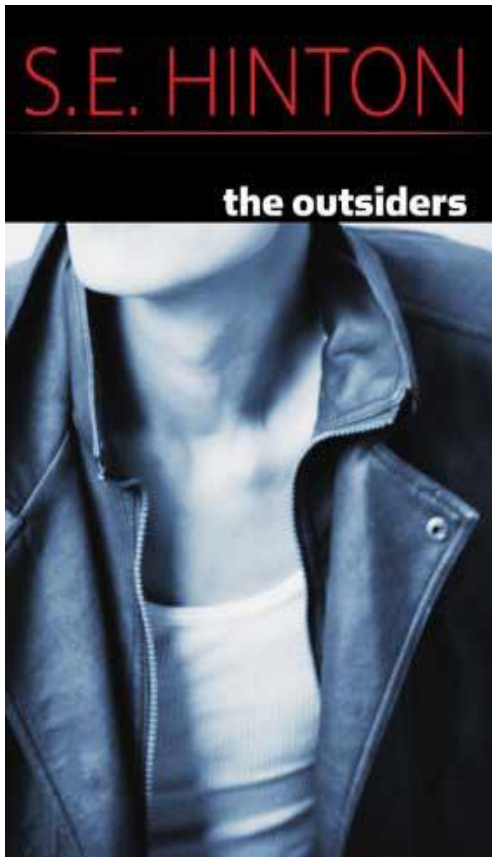


## THE OUTSIDERS Revision



### **PLOT:**

*The Outsiders* is narrated by a fourteen-year-old called Ponyboy Curtis (weird name, but a cool kid). Ponyboy is pretty smart and has a lot of opportunity in front of him, but he comes from the "wrong side of town" and hangs out with a bunch of similarly weirdly-named friends who drop out, smoke cigarettes, and get busted for robbing stores and stealing cars. The biggest ordeal in Ponyboy's life is the war waging between his friends and family (called Greasers), and the "Socs," or wealthy kids who live on the other side of town.

### **THEMES:**

Society & Class  
Loyalty  
Violence  
Appearances

### **CHARACTERS:**

Ponyboy Curtis  
Johnny Cade  
Darrel Curtis  
Sodapop Curtis  
Dallas Winston  
Two-Bit Mathews  
Steve Randle  
Sherri Valance  
Marcia  
Randy Adderson  
Bob Sheldon  
Tim Shepard

### **SETTING:**

East Side/West Side of an unnamed city  
Windrixville  
Church

### **KEY MOMENTS:**

Meeting Cherry at drive in cinema  
Johnny kills Bob  
Fire at Church  
Rumble  
Dally shot  
Johnny dies

# THE OUTSIDERS Revision

## Summary:

*The Outsiders* is narrated by the main character, Ponyboy Curtis. The story is placed in Oklahoma during the 1960s.

In the first chapter, Ponyboy introduces himself and gives a brief history of his family. He also describes the relationships between his gang members, and the relationships within his own family. Ponyboy's parents were killed in an automobile accident, leaving him and his two brothers on their own.

Ponyboy is the youngest at 14, Sodapop is 16, and Darry is 20. The authorities allow the three brothers to stay together as long as they "behave." Ponyboy resents Darry and the total control that he attempts to wield over his life; he views their relationship as adversarial and looks to Sodapop for understanding and love.

The brothers consider their gang members — Steve Randle, Two-Bit Mathews, Dallas Winston, and Johnny Cade — to be family. All of the members come from dysfunctional homes and need the gang relationship as a substitute for what is missing in their own families.

As Ponyboy walks home alone after going to a movie, he realizes the inherent danger of doing so. He explains to the reader that he is a greaser, a term "used to class all us boys on the East Side," which is the poor side of town. Greasers are known for their long, greased hair. Walking home alone is dangerous because the rival gang, the Socs, could easily attack him. The Socs, short for Socials, are "the jet set, the West-side rich kids," who are from upper-middle-class families. Ponyboy explains that the gangs are "just small bunches of friends who stick together, and the warfare is between the social classes."

As if foreshadowing Ponyboy's own poor decision to walk alone, a carload of four Socs arrives, and one pulls a knife on him. As he attempts to fend off his attackers, Ponyboy hears the pounding of footsteps and the attack turns into an all-out fight as his gang arrives to rescue him from the Socs' attack. Ponyboy's two brothers, Darry and Sodapop, along with their four other gang members, chase the Socs away; Ponyboy escapes with cuts and bruises.

## Characters in detail:

### **Ponyboy Curtis**

The novel's fourteen-year-old narrator and protagonist, and the youngest of the greasers. Ponyboy's literary interests and academic accomplishments set him apart from the rest of his gang. Because his parents have died in a car accident, Ponyboy lives with his brothers Darry and Sodapop. Darry repeatedly accuses Ponyboy of lacking common sense, but Ponyboy is a reliable and observant narrator. Throughout the novel, Ponyboy struggles with class division, violence, innocence, and familial love. He matures over the course of the novel, eventually realizing the importance of strength in the face of class bias.

### **Darrel Curtis**

Ponyboy's oldest brother. Darrel, known as "Darry," is a twenty-year-old greaser who is raising Ponyboy because their parents have died in a car crash. Strong, athletic, and intelligent, Darry has quit school. He works two jobs to hold the family together. The unofficial leader of the greasers, he becomes an authority figure for Ponyboy. He also makes good chocolate cake, which he and his brothers eat every day for breakfast. The other greasers call him "Superman."

### **Sodapop Curtis**

Ponyboy's happy-go-lucky, handsome brother. Sodapop is the middle Curtis boy. Ponyboy envies Sodapop's good looks and charm. Sodapop plans to marry Sandy, a greaser girl.

# THE OUTSIDERS Revision

## **Two-Bit Mathews**

The joker of Ponyboy's group. Two-Bit, whose real name is Keith, is a wisecracking greaser who regularly shoplifts. He prizes his sleek black-handled switchblade. He instigates the hostilities between the Socs and the greasers by flirting with Marcia, the girlfriend of a Soc.

## **Steve Randle**

Sodapop's best friend since grade school. Steve is a seventeen-year-old greaser who works with Sodapop at the gas station. Steve knows everything about cars and specializes in stealing hubcaps. He is cocky and intelligent, tall and lean. He wears his thick hair in a complicated arrangement of swirls. He is also tough—he once held off four opponents in a fight with a broken soda bottle. He sees Ponyboy as Sodapop's annoying kid brother and wishes Ponyboy would not tag along so often.

## **Dallas Winston**

The toughest hood in Ponyboy's group of greasers. Dallas, known as "Dally," is a hardened teen who used to run with gangs in New York. He has an elfin face and icy blue eyes and, unlike his friends, does not put grease in his white-blond hair. Dally's violent tendencies make him more dangerous than the other greasers, and he takes pride in his criminal record. Dally feels protective of Johnny Cade.

## **Johnny Cade**

A sixteen-year-old greaser with black hair and large, fearful eyes. Though Johnny does not succeed in school, he approaches intellectual matters with steady concentration. The child of alcoholic, abusive parents, he is nervous and sensitive. Since his parents do not care for him, Johnny sees the greasers as his true family. In turn, the older boys, particularly Dally, are protective of him.

## **Sandy**

Sodapop's girlfriend. Sandy is pregnant with another man's child and moves to Florida to live with her grandmother. Like the other greaser girls, Sandy appears in the text only when the boys mention her.

## **Cherry Valance**

Bob's girlfriend, she is a Soc cheerleader whom Ponyboy meets at the movies. Cherry's real name is Sherri, but people call her Cherry because of her red hair. Ponyboy and Cherry have a great deal in common, and Ponyboy feels comfortable talking to her. Cherry is both offended and intrigued by her encounter with Dally Winston at the drive-in. Cherry admires Dally's individuality and tells Ponyboy that she could fall in love with Dally. In the days preceding the rumble, Cherry becomes a spy for the greasers.

## **Marcia**

Cherry's friend and Randy's girlfriend. Marcia is a pretty, dark-haired Soc who befriends Two-Bit at the drive-in. Marcia and Two-Bit share a sense of humour and a taste for nonsensical musings.

## **Randy Adderson**

Marcia's boyfriend and Bob's best friend. Randy is a handsome Soc who eventually sees the futility of fighting. Along with Cherry, Randy humanizes the Socs by showing that some of them have redeeming qualities. Randy helps Ponyboy realize that Socs are as susceptible to pain as anyone else. Randy tries to make peace with Ponyboy after Ponyboy saves the children from the fire, and he refuses to fight in the Soc-greaser rumble.

# THE OUTSIDERS Revision

## **Bob Sheldon**

Cherry's boyfriend. Bob is the dark-haired Soc who beats up Johnny before the novel begins. Bob has a set of three heavy rings, which he wears when he fights greasers. Bob's indulgent parents have never disciplined him.

## **Themes in detail:**

### **Society and Class**

Much of the action in *The Outsiders* is driven by class conflict. Fourteen-year-old narrator Ponyboy's gang, the Greasers, hail from the economically struggling East Side, while the rival gang, the Socials, come from the wealthy West Side. And, boy, these two groups are locked in a battle with no winners. As author S.E. Hinton tells us that the "Soc vs. Greaser conflict" was inspired by similar rivalries in her own high school. *The Outsiders* is concerned with internal conflict and with its characters' inner lives, but most of the action and conflict is framed by interactions within and between groups.

### **Loyalty**

Loyalty is a point of pride, honour, and principle for Ponyboy Curtis, star player in *The Outsiders*. He doesn't like some of the people in his gang, especially dangerous Dallas Winston, but he would still do anything for Dallas and would defend him from danger if possible. Loyalty, according to Ponyboy, is the thread that holds his gang together. It cuts across their differences. They're loyal to each other because they know each other well, have grown up together, and have faced hard times together. In the case of the Curtis boys, their loyalty is because they are brothers, and orphaned brothers at that. The novel explores what happens when Ponyboy and his oldest brother begin to lose this loyalty for one another, under the strain of their lives.

### **Violence**

*The Outsiders* is a very violent book. Gang violence, child abuse, stabbings, shootings—these drive the action. The novel explores the impact of living in a place where a teenager can't even walk home by himself and where fear is the predominant emotion, as is the case for recently orphaned Ponyboy Curtis and his friends. While Ponyboy hates the violence and bullying in his neighbourhood, he recognizes the positive benefits of friendly sparring between boys, and even "rumbles," so long as weapons aren't used and everybody plays fair. Such activities, he claims, help guys release their endless supplies of energy and pent-up aggression.

### **Appearances**

With a narrator as obsessed with his hair as *The Outsiders'* Ponyboy Curtis is, it's no surprise that that the other characters' looks are also important to him. Clothing and hairstyles might seem like superficial markers, but they're also the means by which people express their public identities. Pony and his gang don't have the cash for designer clothes, but they still manage to develop a distinctive style, which identifies them as Greasers. Pony also spends a lot of time on faces. Dallas Winston has "dangerous" and "hardened" written all over his face. And you can take one look at Johnny Cade and see in his eyes that he's a victimized, hungry, frightened kid. Of course, both Johnny and Dallas are also much more than this, as Pony comes to see. Pony learns he's misread both of his brothers too, because he hasn't been looking at life from their perspectives and has been fooled by their appearances.