



## Quicklet on S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*

*Larry Holzwarth*

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Written by a teenage girl, who chose a teenage boy to narrate the story, *The Outsiders* describes the rivalry between two groups, divided by their social and economic circumstances. The book was instantly successful and remains so today, despite being challenged repeatedly for its depictions of violence, teenage drinking and smoking and juvenile crime.

Set in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the mid-nineteen sixties, *The Outsiders* borrows liberally from cultural icons of its day. There are references to The Beatles and Elvis Presley. Scenes from the book are similar to *West Side Story*, where the Jets and the Sharks can be compared to *The Outsiders* Socs and Greasers. There are lines drawn from contemporary films; sixteen going on seventeen for example, used to describe a character, was the title of a song in the 1965 film, *The Sound of Music*.

Although rather tame by the standards of today, (hard drugs and automatic weapons are conspicuously absent) the book continues to generate controversy for its descriptions of dysfunctional parents and broken homes.

The book was written about teenagers from the perspective of a teenager and was immediately controversial as parents objected to its portrayals of teens coming from dysfunctional homes. Few parents appear in the book and when they do it is generally in an unflattering light. Numerous challenges to *The Outsiders* have resulted in its being banned from school curricula and libraries.

Despite its controversy, *The Outsiders* was awarded The New York Herald Tribune Best Teenage Books Award in 1967, the year of its release. It has won numerous awards since and continues to sell nearly 500,000 copies a year, forty-five years after publication. It has been produced as a stage play, a major motion picture and a short-lived television series. It continues to be part of the curriculum for both middle school and high school in the United States.

## EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

p>The *Outsiders* tells the story of two weeks through the eyes of its narrator, fourteen year old Ponyboy Curtis, recently orphaned and living with his two older brothers in a less than desirable area of town. The brothers and their friends are greasers, so-called because of their lower income circumstances, to distinguish them from the better off Socs (pronounced soashes, short for Socials) More of an economic grouping than an organized gang, the greasers band together for protection from the Socs and for company.

Several of Ponyboy's friends are accomplished delinquents. Petty theft, shoplifting, drinking and smoking cigarettes are amongst their preferred pastimes. The greasers are proud of their scruffy appearance, although Ponyboy expresses some regrets that "nice" girls look down on them at least in part because of the way they looked.

When Ponyboy and his friend Johnny meet some Soc girls at the drive-in they are surprised to find they have so much in common. Walking the girls' home that night leads to an encounter with the girls Socs boyfriends, which in turn leads to the Socs, accompanied by several friends, attacking Ponyboy and Johnny in a park, with Ponyboy being held head down in a fountain. Johnny, who has been jumped and severely beaten by Socs in a previous encounter, defends himself with a knife, resulting in the death of one of the attackers.

Following the advice of the one member of their group who is a true criminal, Dallas, the two boys jump a train out of town and hide out in an abandoned church. While waiting for Dallas to join them Johnny decides to turn himself in. When Dallas arrives, they drive into town for food, returning to the church to collect the few things they had brought with them. They find the church on fire, and several small children, who were attending a picnic, trapped inside.

Ponyboy and Johnny enter the church, rescuing the children but becoming injured in the process. Ponyboy and

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