

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for That Was Then, This Is Now

by  
S.E. Hinton

## Book Information

S.E. Hinton, That Was Then, This Is Now  
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A tough kid finds that his interests and relationships are not what they used to be.

**Award:** ALA Notable/Best Books; Margaret A. Edwards Award; State Award

**Topics:** Community Life, Violence; Family Life, Death

## Main Characters

Angela Shepard the sister of Curly and Tim; she used to date Bryon

Bryon Douglas the main character of the story; a teenager who faces some serious problems and a big decision regarding his "brother," Mark

Cathy Carlson M&M's older sister; she falls in love with Bryon and is devoted to her brother

Charlie the owner of a bar who dies trying to protect Mark and Bryon from some disgruntled patrons they had hustled

Connie the black girl Mike drives home

Curly and Tim Shepard two brothers who cause a lot of trouble for Mark and Bryon

M&M Carlson a young, bright boy who is somewhat a misfit; he is named for his love of candy

Mark Bryon's best friend; he has a knack for trouble and is on probation for stealing cars

Mike Chambers a boy Mark and Bryon meet at the hospital; he has been badly hurt and teaches Bryon something about life

The two Texans the angry men Mark and Bryon hustle out of their money during a pool game

## Vocabulary

**fuzz** a nickname for police

**hippie** the people who reject traditional society and its values; they are sometimes referred to as "flower children" for their commitment to peace and love

**illegitimate** born to unmarried parents

**Socs** a term often used for the rich kids, referring to their social status

**travel agent** a slang name used for a person who supplies drugs

## Synopsis

Bryon and Mark are best friends, but are more like brothers. Mark's parents died when he was nine years old, and young Mark went to live with Bryon Douglas and his mother. They have been inseparable ever since. Mark and Bryon have a knack for mischief, and Bryon notes that Mark seems to get away with everything. The boys smoke, drink, and get into fights. Mark has a knack for hot-wiring cars and is currently on probation. Bryon is skilled at pool and often enlists Mark's help to hustle unwary customers out of their money.

Mark and Bryon are fond of an innocent and trusting young boy named M&M. M&M is often teased by his father for his long hair and his hippie values. M&M mentions that his sister, Cathy, is home from school, and this sets the stage for the romance that later develops between Bryon and Cathy.

Bryon's mother is in the hospital, and money is scarce for the family. While visiting her at the hospital one day, Mom suggests Bryon and Mark go visit the boy in the room across the hall. The boys learn his name is Mike Chambers, and he has been beaten very badly. Mike relays his story to them. One evening, he tried to keep his friends from hassling an attractive black girl. He drove her home to make sure she remained safe, but when he dropped her off in her neighborhood, he was ambushed and beaten senseless by the girl's friends. He admits that he harbors no grudge against any of them, though. Mark says he would hate someone forever who hurts him that badly.

Bryon is soon reunited with Cathy, who is older and

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much prettier than the last time he saw her. She works at the hospital snack bar. The two begin dating, and Bryon finds himself falling in love with a girl for the first time in his life. He admires her family for loving and caring about each other. Mark, meanwhile, is feeling alienated from Bryon because he spends so much time with Cathy. Cathy and Mark do not like each other. Bryon, too, notices that Mark is spending a lot of time away, and that he has quite a bit of money.

One evening, after hustling two Texans at Charlie's pool parlor, Mark and Bryon are ambushed in the alley. The Texans have a gun, but Mark and Bryon are saved when Charlie appears with a sawed-off shotgun. In saving the boys' lives, Charlie loses his own. Bryon is distraught, while Mark is cool and strangely unaffected. Mark notices the two of them drifting further apart.

Later, M&M runs away from home. Cathy blames her father for not understanding his hippie ways and for constantly teasing him. Mark eventually lets on that he knows where M&M is -- he has been living at a hippie commune since he disappeared. Bryon and Cathy later go to the hippie house to find M&M strung-out and very sick from using heavy drugs. Bryon and Cathy take M&M to the hospital, where the doctor tells them M&M's mind may never be normal again. During this time, Cathy and Bryon admit their love for each other. Bryon is amazed that he can talk so freely with someone.

One night, while looking for cigarettes in his room, Bryon discovers a large stash of pills and realizes Mark has been dealing drugs. Bryon is shattered and calls the police on Mark. Cathy stops by to see him, but Bryon is cold to her and becomes withdrawn. He decides that he no longer loves her and never dates her again.

Mark ends up in a juvenile detention center where he is most certainly headed for prison if he does not improve his behavior. Bryon makes one last attempt to visit Mark, but finds his friend is filled with nothing but hate for him. Mark is now sinister, and Bryon believes Mark would kill him if he could. Time

passes and Bryon hears that Mark is now in a state prison. Bryon improves his grades, works hard at his job, and longs for the past, when he "had all the answers."

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

After Charlie dies, Bryon says, "Death by violence isn't the same as dying any other way, accident or disease or old age." What does this mean?

*Violence is cruel and criminal. It brings death that is usually unnecessary and senseless. It is a death that comes out of negative feelings toward another. Accidents and disease are terrible, but at least there is some sort of closure because those things happen inevitably. Death by old age is expected; though sad, hopefully the person had the opportunity to lead a good life. In contrast, violent death robs a person of any opportunity to have a good life.*

### Literary Analysis

Which character in the novel is the most dynamic, or undergoes the most change? How does this happen?

*Bryon is the main character whose change and growth mirrors the action in the story. Through his experiences with Mark, M&M, Cathy, Charlie, and others, he begins to mature and see the world differently. Bryon finds that he is changing in a way that Mark is not, which causes hostility and conflict in the story.*

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## Inferential Comprehension

Why does Connie probably have her friends beat up Mike? Do you think she is right to do this?

*She may be frustrated from years of prejudice, cruel comments, and cruel actions directed at her. This is very likely her way of getting back at the white people whom she views as her tormentors. Perhaps she does not think Mike is any different from the rest of his gang. Students will probably say that initiating violence is never justified and she should not have done it.*

## Constructing Meaning

Mark hates Bryon for calling the police on him. Could Bryon's actions be considered a betrayal? Why or why not?

*Some might argue that Bryon's actions are necessary, and Bryon only calls the police because it is in Mark's best interests. Mark has always gotten away with everything, and he deserves to face consequences for his drug selling. In this way, Bryon's actions are not a betrayal -- he is only trying to help his friend. On the other hand, some may think what Bryon does is unnecessary and cruel. After all, Mark does offer to stop selling drugs, if only Bryon will give him the chance.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** This book deals with specific racial issues. Bryon mentions such groups as the Black Revolution and the Black Panthers. Have students research these groups as well as organizations such as the NAACP. Who founded these groups? What is their purpose? Have they helped the plight of African-Americans? What do students think about these organizations?

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** The hippie movement is discussed in some detail in this novel. It may be fun for students to learn about hippies and their lives. Many aspects can be examined. When was the hippie movement? What kind of people became hippies? What beliefs and values did hippies have? What kind of

music defined the hippie movement? Who are some of the most famous hippies in history? Who are the most influential writers of the hippie movement?

**Understanding the Author's Craft** At first, M&M confuses Bryon's name with the poet, Lord Byron. He tells Bryon that he should write poetry to keep up the Byronic tradition. Select a few of Lord Byron's poems to read to the class. Then have the students research the life of Lord Byron to see whether they are able to find any comparisons between Lord Byron or his characters and Bryon Douglas. They may share their findings with the class.

**Recognizing Details** Drugs and alcohol are subjects that are given a lot of attention in this novel. Bryon and Mark are often drinking or drunk. M&M goes to the hippie house, uses a variety of drugs, then overdoses. Mark is even discovered to be selling drugs. Specific drugs such as LSD, dope, and acid are mentioned. As a way to reinforce the dangers of drugs, have students research the negative effects of some of the most common drugs available, from nicotine to caffeine to crack. Which drugs are the most addictive? Which are the most harmful? Which parts of the body are affected by different drugs? What are the long-term effects?