

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Outsiders

by  
S.E. Hinton

### Book Information

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

Rivalry between rich and poor gangs in 1960s Oklahoma leads to the deaths of three teenagers and intense soul-searching for one of the kids involved, a sensitive fourteen-year-old writer named Ponyboy.

**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 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  
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 quiet, sensitive greaser who is abused by his parents  
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 greasers who hang out with Ponyboy and his brothers

### Vocabulary

**bleach** to lighten or whiten by removing color from; to blanch  
**delirious** unable to think clearly, often due to an illness or an overexcited imagination; having thoughts that are wild or insane; raving or ecstatic  
**gallant** brave and of high moral character; having or displaying courage or grace; possessing the traits characteristic of a gentleman; noble; dignified; magnificent; majestic; splendid; lively and spirited; dashing  
**ornery** having an unpleasant or contrary manner, personality, or disposition; difficult to control or deal with; tending to be mean or harsh; not friendly  
**reckless** tending not to exercise caution; tending not to think of consequences before one acts; foolhardy or unwise; rash; bold; daring; wild  
**reformatory** a correctional institution for the detention, discipline, and training of young or first-time offenders or lawbreakers; a reform school  
**tension** nervousness; a strained excitement; suspense; a feeling of hostility between two or more individuals or groups; a feeling of emotional or mental strain  
**theme** a main or central idea, especially of a written work, work of art, or piece of music; an assignment in which a student is to write about a particular idea or topic  
**towheaded** light-haired; having very pale blonde hair; whitish-blond  
**vaguely** dimly or unclearly; indistinctly; faintly; in an unsure or uncertain manner; aimlessly or without purpose

### 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

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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 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. Later, the police think Dally has a loaded gun and shoot him down.

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.

#### 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.*

#### 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 reputation out of class.*

### Teachable Skills

**Understanding Literary Features** Understanding Literary Features

**Understanding Characterization** Understanding characterization

**Responding to Literature** Responding to Literature

**Making Predictions** Making Predictions