

The Outsiders

Background Info

Author Bio

Full Name: Susan Eloise Hinton

Pen Name: S. E. Hinton

Date of Birth: July 22, 1948

Place of Birth: Tulsa, Oklahoma

Brief Life Story: S. E. Hinton grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the city in which *The Outsiders* is set. Writing helped her to process her experiences and find refuge from her troubled home life. During Hinton's teenage years, she wrote two books that were unpublished before she wrote *The Outsiders*, which was published when she was 19 years old. The book was based on the social problems she witnessed at her Tulsa high school. After *The Outsiders*, she wrote several other young adult books. In recent years, she has published children's fiction and adult fiction as well. In 1988, the American Library Association awarded her the Margaret A. Edwards Award, which honors the work of authors whose books have proven to speak for and to adolescents. She was also awarded the 1998 Arrell Gibson Lifetime Achievement Award by the Oklahoma Center for the Book. Hinton lives in Tulsa with her husband.

Key Facts

Full Title: *The Outsiders*

Genre: Young adult fiction

Setting: Tulsa, Oklahoma

Climax: The deaths of Johnny and Dally

Protagonist: Ponyboy

Antagonists: The Socs

Point of View: First person

Historical and Literary Context

When Written: 1964-5

Where Written: Tulsa, Oklahoma

When Published: 1967

Literary Period: Modern American

Related Literary Works: Hinton wrote *The Outsiders* in part because she wanted to read a book like it. She felt that the fiction available to teenagers at the time did not depict the adolescent experience in a realistic way. She wanted to write about the experiences of herself and her peers in school, so that others would be aware of some of the real problems facing teenagers in her day. Hinton's works of young adult fiction, which also included *Rumble Fish*, *Tex*, *That was Then*, *This is Now*, and *Taming the Star Runner*, helped to lay the foundations for what is today a booming sector of the publishing industry: realistic young adult fiction.

Related Historical Events: The book reflects the growing disillusionment and social stratification Americans experienced during the 1960s. Young people were finding

their voices and making their presence felt on the political stage. Race relations were changing dramatically as the Civil Rights Movement drew attention to systematic and pervasive discrimination against African Americans. Though Hinton does not refer directly to any historical or political events in her work, the book seeks to elevate public awareness of marginalized groups and to validate the voices and experiences of young people.

Extra Credit

Could a girl write this? *The Outsiders* was published under the pen name S. E. Hinton because publishers didn't think readers would believe this story could be written by a woman. After she had established herself as a writer, Hinton continued to use the pen name in order to protect her privacy.

Rocky path to success: S. E. Hinton's extraordinary success as a young adult writer was not always a sure thing. Hinton's mother once threw her manuscripts into a trash burner, from which Hinton barely rescued them. After *The Outsiders* was published, the book was so popular that Hinton felt tremendous pressure to produce another one. This pressure led to a three-year writer's block that ended when she met her husband during her college years and he encouraged her to begin writing again. She did, and she produced some of her most admired works as a result.

Plot Summary

Ponyboy Curtis, a member of the greasers, a gang of poor East Side kids in Tulsa, leaves a movie theater and begins to walk home alone. A car follows him, and he suspects that it is filled with a bunch of Socs (pronounced "sohsh-es"), members of rich West Side gang who recently beat up his friend **Johnny**. The car stops, and several Socs emerge and begin roughing Ponyboy up and try to cut off his **hair**. Ponyboy's cries for help alert his brothers and fellow greasers, and the Socs flee. Afterward, Ponyboy's older brother **Darry**, who is also his guardian since their parents' death, scolds him for walking alone.

The next night, Johnny and Ponyboy go to the drive-in with fellow greaser **Dally**. Despite Dally's unpleasant behavior toward two Soc girls, Ponyboy strikes up a friendship with one of them, whose name is **Cherry Valance**. Ponyboy tells her about the Socs' attack on Johnny, and she insists that not all Socs are like that. Cherry tells him about some of the problems Socs have, and they find out they share a love of watching **sunsets**.

The girls and greasers walk out of the drive-in together, and are confronted by a Soc named Bob, who is Cherry's boyfriend, and his friends. Things almost come to blows, but Cherry puts a stop to the confrontation by leaving with Bob. Before going home, Ponyboy talks with Johnny in the vacant lot and falls

asleep. He returns home late, and Darry gets so angry that he hits Ponyboy, who runs from the house and goes with Johnny to the park. There, they run into Bob and his Soc friends. The Socs attack, dunking Ponyboy's head into the fountain. Johnny stabs and kills **Bob**. Dally helps them escape town.

The boys take refuge in an abandoned church in the countryside. There, they cut their **hair** to disguise themselves and then spend five days talking, smoking cigarettes, and reading from *Gone with the Wind*. Dally comes to visit them and, on the way back from a restaurant, they find the church in flames. Johnny and Ponyboy run inside to save a group of schoolchildren who have come to the site for a picnic. They save the children but are all injured, including Dally, and are rushed to the hospital. At the hospital, Ponyboy recognizes for the first time how much Darry really cares for him. He also learns that Dally will recover, but Johnny's condition is extremely serious.

The next night is set for a rumble between the greasers and the Socs. Ponyboy talks with **Randy**, Bob's best friend, who says that he has decided not to fight because after Bob's death he has realized it won't accomplish anything. Ponyboy is not feeling well, and he, too, is skeptical about the purpose of fighting, but he does participate in the rumble, which the greasers win.

Afterwards, Dally and Ponyboy go to visit Johnny in the hos-

pital, where they hear his last words: "Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold." In despair over Johnny's death, Dally flees the hospital, robs a grocery store, threatens the police with his unloaded gun, and gets shot dead. Ponyboy, in worse health after the rumble, is unconscious and delirious for several days.

When Ponyboy recovers, the Socs and greasers attend a court hearing. Johnny is vindicated by all witnesses as having acted in self-defense. However, Ponyboy is depressed, his grades begin to suffer, and he almost turns to violence. His English teacher offers him a chance to pass by writing a final essay on the topic of his choice. Ponyboy can't think of a topic, though, and he and Darry fight about his lack of motivation. Sodapop becomes upset, and pleads with the brothers to stop fighting because it is tearing him apart. Ponyboy and Darry agree not to fight anymore.

Back at home that night, Ponyboy examines a copy of *Gone with the Wind* that Johnny left him. Out of it drops a note, written by Johnny, urging Ponyboy to keep his idealism and never give up hope for a better life. Ponyboy decides to write his essay about his experiences during the last several weeks. With it, he hopes to bring attention to the plight of boys like himself and to honor the memory of the ones who died. The first sentence of the essay is the first sentence of the novel.

Characters

Ponyboy Curtis – At 14 years old, the youngest Curtis brother and greaser. Ponyboy is intelligent and sensitive and has certain un-greaserlike characteristics: he likes to go to movies by himself, does well in school, and appreciates **sunsets**. The events of the novel cause him to think about the kind of life he wants to lead and motivate him to work for change in his community. He learns to see the humanity in his enemies, and takes steps to help others see that humanity as well.

Darry Curtis – The oldest of the Curtis brothers. Darry is 20, hardworking, and rarely shows his feelings. After the boys' parents died, Darry passed up a college scholarship and took responsibility for raising his younger brothers. Darry has high expectations for **Ponyboy**, and Ponyboy's occasional failure to meet those expectations causes tension between the broth-

ers. Over the course of the novel, Darry learns how to show Ponyboy that he cares about him.

Sodapop Curtis – The middle Curtis brother. Sodapop is handsome and fun-loving. A high school dropout who enjoys working with cars and has a job at a gas station, he is a compassionate and supportive sibling to his two brothers. He often finds himself in the middle of their fights.

Johnny Cade – The second youngest of the greasers. Johnny is 16, a close friend to **Ponyboy**, and beloved by the entire gang. He comes from an abusive and neglectful home, and he spends as little time there as possible. The greasers are his true family, and they regard him as a little brother. Johnny's courageous acts and words, as well as his premature death,

inspire Ponyboy to write about his experiences and to pursue a better path in his life.

Dallas Winston – A tough, hardened greaser. Dally grew up on the streets of New York and learned early to depend upon himself. He has a long criminal record and is prone to risk-taking, yet he is also a loyal and compassionate friend. He is devoted to **Johnny**, in whom he sees the potential that he himself has lost.

Two-Bit Mathews – The oldest of the greaser gang. Two-Bit is quick-witted and is always telling jokes. **Ponyboy** appreciates that Two-Bit treats him as an equal.

Steve Randle – **Sodapop**'s best friend. Steve works with

Sodapop at the gas station and spends a lot of time at the Curtis home. **Ponyboy** feels that Steve regards him as a child and a tagalong.

Bob Sheldon – The leader of the Socs and **Cherry's** boyfriend. Bob is a tough, intimidating boy who gets killed by Johnny when he and his friends attack **Johnny** and **Ponyboy**. Over the course of the novel, Ponyboy learns that Bob had his own troubles and difficulties growing up.

Randy Adderson – **Bob's** best friend and **Marcia's** boyfriend. Randy is a Soc who participates in the attack on **Ponyboy** and **Johnny**. In the aftermath of Bob's death, Randy becomes introspective, befriends Ponyboy, and works to end the violence between the Socs and greasers.

Cherry Valance – A Soc and **Bob's** girlfriend. Cherry is open-minded, sensitive, and courageous. She befriends **Pony-**

boy early in the novel and helps him to see that Socs are people, too. After Bob dies, Cherry plays a minor role as a liaison between the two gangs. Ponyboy always keeps in mind her contention that, despite the superficial differences between them, the Socs and greasers see the same **sunset**.

Marcia – **Cherry's** best friend and **Randy's** girlfriend.

Sandy – A greaser girl and **Sodapop's** first love, she breaks Soda's heart when she moves to Florida to have a baby that isn't his and refuses his offer of marriage.

Buck Merril – **Dally's** friend and rodeo partner. He is a tough guy known for throwing wild parties.

Tim Shepard – Leader of the Shepard gang, a gang friendly to, but tougher than, the greasers. Tim is a good friend of **Dally's**.

Curly Shepard – **Tim Shepard's** younger brother.

Mr. Syme – **Ponyboy's** English teacher. He gives Ponyboy a second chance when his grades are slipping. An essay he assigns to Ponyboy and his gang turns into the novel itself.

Jerry Wood – An elementary school teacher whose students are saved by **Johnny** and **Ponyboy** in the church fire. Jerry accompanies Ponyboy and encourages Ponyboy to see himself as a hero, despite the details Ponyboy shares about **Bob's** death and **Dally's** criminal past.

Mrs. O'Briant – An elementary school teacher whose students are saved by **Johnny** and **Ponyboy** in the church fire.

Mrs. Cade – Johnny's mother.

Paul Holden – A former friend of Darry's from high school, he's gone to college and fights Darry during the rumble.

Themes

In LitCharts, each theme gets its own corresponding color, which you can use to track where the themes occur in the work. There are two ways to track themes:

- Refer to the color-coded bars next to each plot point throughout the *Summary and Analysis* sections.
- Use the *ThemeTracker* section to get a quick overview of where the themes appear throughout the entire work.

Divided Communities

Ponyboy stands in the middle of two major conflicts: the conflict between the Socs and greasers, and the conflict between Ponyboy and **Darry** within the Curtis family. In the gang conflict, the novel shows how the two groups focus on their differences—they dress differently, socialize differently, and hang out with different girls—and how this focus on superficial differences leads to hate and violence. Yet the novel also shows how the two groups depend on their conflict in order to continue to exist. The greasers, for instance, live by a pledge to “stick together” against the Socs. Without the conflict, the two gangs' individual members might go their own way.

The novel's other divided community is Ponyboy's immediate family. Like the conflict between Socs and greasers, the conflict between Darry and Ponyboy is fueled by misperceptions. Just as the Socs and greasers are unable to see past their superficial differences to their deeper similarities, Darry and Ponyboy can't see past their own limited view to understand each other's actions. Ponyboy misinterprets Darry's desperate desire to deliver Ponyboy from the poverty and strife of their neighborhood as antagonism, while Darry interprets Ponyboy's quest to escape his conflict-ridden existence as irresponsibility and lack of consideration.

Empathy

Empathy, the ability to see things through another person's perspective, is central to the resolution of both the gang and the family conflict in *The Outsiders*. The two gangs' preoccupation with the appearance and class status of their rivals underscores the superficiality of their mutual hostility, which thrives on stereotypes and prejudice. Certain characters can see past the stereotypes, however. When **Cherry** befriends **Ponyboy** at the drive-in and insists that “things are rough all

over,” she encourages Ponyboy to see Socs as individuals, and he begins to question the conflict between the gangs. **Randy** furthers forces Ponyboy to feel compassion for Socs as individual people by sharing details about **Bob's** troubled life. Ultimately, Ponyboy himself takes on the role of showing the two groups their shared humanity by writing his English essay, which turns out to be the novel itself.

In the Curtis family, it is **Sodapop** who helps Ponyboy recognize that Darry's high expectations for Ponyboy result from **Darry's** love for Ponyboy and determination to provide Ponyboy with the shot at a better life. In the end, their newfound admiration for one another, combined with a desire to protect the pained Sodapop from unnecessary grief, brings about a pledge not to fight anymore.

Preserving Childhood Innocence

The Outsiders shows the importance of preserving the hope, open-mindedness, and appreciation of beauty that are characteristic of childhood. **Ponyboy's** daydreams about the country, his appreciation of **sunrises and sunsets**, and his rescue of the children from the burning church distinguish him from other characters in the novel. These traits show that Ponyboy, unlike the other boys, still has preserved some of his childhood innocence. They also allow him to see beyond the shallow hatred between the Socs and greasers.

Primarily through the characters of **Dally** and **Johnny**, the novel also shows how easily experience can harden people and cause them to lose these youthful traits. It also shows the tragic results of this process. Dally's rough youth has made him tough and fearsome, and he seems not to care about anything. But Dally has a soft spot too—his love for Johnny. Johnny represents the hope that Dally has lost, and Dally strives to protect Johnny from the forces that threaten to pull him into the cycle of violence that has enveloped Dally. When Johnny and Dally die, an acknowledgment of the death of any hope in his life. Johnny's dying words, “stay gold,” also touch on this theme by referencing the Robert Frost poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” While the poem's message—that all beautiful things fade with the passage of time—forces the two boys to realize that they can't hide from the realities of growing up, Johnny's call for Ponyboy and the greasers to “stay gold” is also a call for them to preserve the hope and optimism of childhood no matter what the world throws at them.

to which they belong—in their first conversation at the drive-in, **Cherry** and **Ponyboy** find common ground in their enjoyment of the same sunset from opposite sides of town.

Greasers' Hair

The greaser's long, slick hair is a symbol of their gang, both to themselves and to others. When **Ponyboy** and **Johnny** cut and dye their hair while in hiding they're taking a symbolic step outside the gang. As a result, Ponyboy feels less secure, but also gains a bit of room in which to develop his individuality.

Self-Sacrifice and Honor

Despite the greasers' reputation as heartless young criminals, they live by a specific and honorable code of friendship, and there are many instances in which gang and family members make selfless choices. These choices often reflect a desire to make life better for the next generation of youths. **Darry** forfeited a college scholarship for a full-time manual labor job in order to support his younger brothers. **Dally**, who seems not to care about anything, demonstrates great loyalty to and compassion for his friends and for strangers in need. He helps **Johnny** and **Ponyboy** slip away to the rural town of Windrixville after Bob's stabbing, and he plays a key role in the church fire rescue. Dally's death is the ultimate tribute to Johnny, without whom life seemed meaningless. Ponyboy's essay is a different and perhaps more powerful response to Johnny's death. He honors both of his deceased friends by telling their story, an act of generosity intended to benefit the greater community.

Individual Identity

Both the Socs and the greasers sacrifice their individuality to the styles and sentiments of their groups. Greasers, for example, wear their **hair** long and oiled, and share a common hostility toward the Socs.

At the start of the novel, **Ponyboy** is a dedicated greaser even though he knows that certain aspects of his personality make him different from the rest of the gang. The gang provides him with too great of a sense of safety and strength to even consider life outside of it. But the events surrounding **Bob's** death cause Ponyboy to think more deeply about who he wants to be, and his conversations with **Johnny**, **Cherry**, and **Randy** lead him to reflect on the path his life is taking. He begins to question the reasons for conflict between Socs and greasers, and he thinks hard about the decision to participate in the rumble. Ponyboy's willingness to enter friendships with Socs signals the development of a distinct personal identity, one that includes association with the greasers but excludes total devotion to the greaser way of life. **Darry** encourages Ponyboy to pursue a life beyond gang membership, and the deaths of Johnny and **Dally** inspire the expression of his individual point of view in the English essay he writes. By the end of the novel, **Ponyboy** has committed himself to a life that will, at least in part, encourage other boys to find their own paths and voices, outside of the gang identity.

The Blue Mustang

The blue Mustang represents the Socs wealth as well as the danger they pose to greasers. When **Ponyboy** or another greaser spots the Mustang, he knows trouble is coming. As the novel progresses, however, and Ponyboy comes to understand and feel compassion for the Socs, the Mustang loses some of its power to intimidate. Ponyboy actually sits inside of it when **Randy** and he talk about the church fire and the rumble.


Symbols

Symbols are shown in **red** text whenever they appear in the *Plot Summary* and *Summary and Analysis* sections of this LitChart.

Sunsets and Sunrises

Sunsets and sunrises in *The Outsiders* represent the beauty and goodness in the world, particularly after Johnny compares the gold in the poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay” to the gold of the sunrises and sunsets Ponyboy enjoys. The sunset also stands for the common humanity of all people, regardless of the gang

Summary and Analysis

The color-coded bars in *Summary and Analysis* make it easy to track the themes through the work. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section. For instance, a bar of  indicates that all five themes apply to that part of the summary.

Chapter 1

Ponyboy Curtis, the narrator of *The Outsiders*, walks out of a movie theater in Tulsa, and heads home. He enjoys watching movies alone, but now wishes he had some company because greasers like him aren't safe from members of a rival gang, the Socs. Greasers, Ponyboy says, are from the East Side and are poorer than the West Side Socs. Greasers wear their **hair** long, dress in jeans and leather jackets, and some steal, rob, and fight in public. Ponyboy, however, avoids such behavior because his strict older brother **Darry** would kill him (or his middle brother **Sodapop**) if they got into trouble. Ponyboy adds that Darry, who cares for his two younger siblings in the wake of their parents' deaths, would yell at him if he knew he was walking alone. He'd also say that he wasn't using his head.

Ponyboy notices a red Corvair following him. He suspects it's a group of Socs, and thinks of his friend **Johnny**, who was recently badly beaten by the Socs. The car pulls up next to Ponyboy. Five Socs get out. They taunt Ponyboy, threaten to cut off his **hair** with a switchblade, and pin him down. He fears for his life and attempts in vain to fight back while screaming for help. His brothers and other greasers hear his cries and come to his aid. The Socs flee.

After the other greasers return from chasing off the Socs, **Ponyboy** comments on each of their qualities. **Steve Randle**, **Sodapop's** best friend, loves cars but treats Ponyboy like a child. **Two-Bit Matthews** always has a joke to tell, likes to fight, and gets in trouble with the police. **Dallas Winston** radiates danger and toughness, and was first arrested at the age of ten. **Johnny Cade** is younger than the others, has a violent home life, and is treated with special care by the gang.

Once it's clear the danger has passed, **Darry** scolds Ponyboy for walking alone without a weapon. **Ponyboy** bristles at Darry's words. **Sodapop** defends Ponyboy.

Dally invites everyone to the double feature at the drive-in the next night. **Ponyboy** and **Johnny** agree to go. Dally reveals that he has broken up with his girlfriend, and Ponyboy wonders what non-greaser girls are like.

Back at home, **Ponyboy** works on his homework and thinks about the sacrifices **Darry** has made: passing up a college scholarship and working construction to support the Curtis family after their parents died. As they fall asleep, **Sodapop** tells Ponyboy that Darry's harsh words result from his big responsibilities and his desire to protect Ponyboy. Sodapop also confesses his love for his sweetheart **Sandy** and reveals his plans to marry her when she finishes school.

Ponyboy's descriptions establish the conflict between the Socs and greasers as being based on class and appearance. The conflict between Ponyboy and Darry is also established in this opening scene. In addition, while Ponyboy obviously identifies with both the greasers and his brothers, his thoughts show that he has some unique qualities: his introspection, intelligence, occasional carelessness and lack of common sense, and his avoidance of trouble.



When assaulting Ponyboy, the Socs focus on his long hair, a superficial part of greaser identity. Instead of seeing him as an individual, they see him only as a member of a rival group. Ponyboy's fears of death show the seriousness of the conflict and foreshadow the deaths that occur later in the novel.



Though he and Johnny are the youngest of the gang, Ponyboy resents being treated like a child by Steve Randle. He wants to be treated like an adult, a full member of the gang. Note that Darry and Johnny's childhoods were both fraught with violence, signalling a connection between those two. Johnny is portrayed as especially vulnerable.



Curtis family dynamics: Darry's efforts to keep Ponyboy safe sound to Ponyboy like criticisms. Sodapop acts as mediator.



Ponyboy's musings about Soc girls hints at his capacity to see past the Soc-Greaser conflict and foreshadows the friendship he will soon strike up with Cherry Valance.



Ponyboy knows the sacrifices that Darry has had to make since the boys' parents died. Sodapop tries to get Ponyboy to see things from Darry's perspective, but Ponyboy isn't fully ready to accept that Darry is not criticizing him.



Chapter 2

The next night, **Johnny** and **Ponyboy** meet **Dally** and head to the drive-in. On the way, they make a little bit of trouble at a drugstore, where Dally shoplifts cigarettes. The boys then sneak in to one of the drive-ins that greasers often visit.

Like many things in town, the drive-ins are usually segregated between Socs and greasers. Hinton illustrates typical greaser behavior in the drugstore shoplifting scene.



There are some Socs at the drive-in, and the boys sit down behind two Soc girls. Dally harasses the girls with dirty talk. Ponyboy feels uncomfortable and declines to join in, while Johnny leaves to get a Coke. One of the girls, a redhead named **Cherry Valance**, calmly tells Dally to shut up. He doesn't listen. The girls refer to the boys as "greasers" and "hoods."

Ponyboy shows his independence through his disapproval of some of the more unpleasant greaser behavior. That he is bothered by the Soc girls' labeling of him and his friends shows that he can see past those labels.



Soon **Dally** walks off to the concession booth, and **Cherry** and **Ponyboy** start talking. Cherry compliments Ponyboy's name, and as they talk about school Ponyboy reveals that he's skipped a grade. They also talk about Sodapop, whom Cherry calls a "doll." She wonders where Sodapop has been recently. Ashamed, Ponyboy admits that **Soda** has dropped out of school to work at a gas station.

Cherry demonstrates open-mindedness in her conversation with Ponyboy. She seems genuinely interested in him as a person and does not treat him as just another greaser. Ponyboy's sensitivity and academic success do actually set him apart from most greasers.



When **Johnny** returns, **Cherry** smiles at him. But when **Dally** soon returns and offers Cherry a Coke, she throws it in Dally's face and calls him a "greaser." Dally continues to pester her until Johnny tells Dally to leave Cherry alone. Dally, shocked, storms off. **Ponyboy** thinks about the relationship between Johnny and Dally, commenting that Johnny is Dally's "pet," while Dally is Johnny's hero. Cherry expresses gratitude to Johnny, and the girls invite Johnny and Ponyboy to sit with them.

When Dally is away, the Soc girls, Ponyboy, and Johnny seem like they could be friends. But as soon as Dally starts acting like a greaser, that's all the girls see in him. Dally's non-violent reaction to Johnny's command shows the bond the two share. Dally respects Johnny's kindness, even if he can't show such kindness himself.



The Soc girls continue talking with **Ponyboy** and **Johnny**. Johnny eventually asks Cherry why she isn't afraid of them the way she is of **Dally**. She explains that they don't act, speak, or look in the mean or frightening way that Dally does. The girls then reveal that they abandoned their boyfriends because their boyfriends brought alcohol to the drive-in.

Cherry is willing to get to know people rather than relying on stereotypes. She sees Johnny and Ponyboy for what they say and do, not just how they look. The boyfriends' behavior indicates that Socs aren't better people than greasers.



Suddenly, **Two-Bit** comes up behind the boys and shouts, "Okay, greasers, you've had it." Johnny and Ponyboy jump, thinking that they're being confronted by a Soc. **Johnny** is particularly shaken. Two-Bit sits down and banters with **Cherry** and **Marcia**. He's looking for **Dally**, who's slashed the tires of a car owned by another local tough, **Tim Shepard**, and is about to fight him. They discuss the rules of fair fighting, which the boys say are commonly understood among greasers but not always respected by Socs. Cherry and **Ponyboy** get up to buy popcorn. Waiting in line, Cherry asks Ponyboy about Johnny's past.

Ponyboy and Johnny are aware that they're taking a risk by socializing in public with Soc girls. Two-Bit's joke foreshadows the fight between Socs and greasers that occurs in Chapter 4. More details of the greasers' code of conduct are revealed when Two-Bit talks about what makes for a fair fight. Johnny's reaction to the scare illustrates how deeply the Socs' recent attack on him has scarred him.



Ponyboy tells **Cherry** that the Socs attacked **Johnny** four months earlier: the greasers found Johnny lying motionless in the park. The severity of his wounds shocked them all, but **Dally** was especially affected. Johnny revealed that a group of Socs in a blue **Mustang** threatened and beat him for no apparent reason. Johnny now carries a switchblade that he plans to use if he ever gets jumped again.

The attack on Johnny highlights the destructive and senseless nature of the Soc-greaser conflict. Dally's reaction to Johnny's injuries again shows his particular desire to protect the younger boy. Johnny's switchblade will prove important in later chapters.



Ponyboy's story shocks **Cherry**. She assures Ponyboy that all Socs are not like the ones who jumped **Johnny**. Ponyboy is doubtful. Cherry persists by reasoning, for instance, that not all greasers are not like **Dally**. Ponyboy concedes the point. Cherry tells Ponyboy that Socs have problems, too, and says, "Things are rough all over." Ponyboy doesn't understand what she means.

Cherry begins to help Ponyboy see people as individuals, and to understand that those individuals have similarities, regardless of their appearance or their group.



Chapter 3

Cherry and **Marcia** realize that they don't have a ride home from the drive-in. **Two-Bit** talks them into accepting a ride from him, and the three boys and two girls walk to Two-Bit's house to get his car. On the way, Cherry tells **Ponyboy** about what it's like to be a Soc, including the search for fulfillment from sources beyond just material possessions, and the pressure to be cool and unemotional. The two of them agree that in contrast to the aloof Socs, who try to hide their emotions, the greasers tend to feel their emotions too strongly. As they talk, the two of them also discover a shared love of reading and watching **sunsets**. Ponyboy realizes that, despite their different classes and friends, the two of them see the same sunset.

Cherry already helped Ponyboy see that Socs are individuals who have similar concerns to greasers. Now Ponyboy and Cherry find that they too have a number of common interests. The sunset here symbolizes the connections between Ponyboy and Cherry, and the connections between all people, regardless of their different situations and group affiliations. Ponyboy's love of sunsets also displays his appreciation for life's beauty, something that many of the gang members, on both sides, seem to have lost.



Just then, **Marcia** notices a blue **Mustang** coming down the street, and everyone becomes nervous, especially **Johnny**. The car passes slowly and keeps going.

The blue Mustang represents the Socs' wealth and power: the greasers must always walk, while the Socs drive fancy cars.



Cherry then asks **Ponyboy** about **Darry**. Ponyboy responds that Darry doesn't like him. **Two-Bit** and **Johnny** are surprised. They had thought all was well among the Curtis brothers. Ponyboy gets upset and comments on Johnny's own dysfunctional family, but he quickly apologizes after Two-Bit smacks him in the head.

Ponyboy's touchiness regarding Darry reflects the simmering conflict between the two of them, but Johnny and Two-Bit's surprise indicates that Ponyboy may have misunderstood Darry—he may not have empathy for Darry's point of view.



The **Mustang** approaches again and this time stops beside the group. The boys in the car are Socs. One of them is **Cherry's** boyfriend, **Bob**, who pleads with the girls to forgive them for drinking. **Johnny** seems spooked, and **Ponyboy** realizes that Bob was the one who attacked Johnny. Insults fly between the Socs and greasers, and the tension builds: **Two-Bit** hands Ponyboy a broken bottle and pulls out a switchblade. A fight seems inevitable until Cherry intervenes, agreeing to leave with Bob. Before she and **Marcia** get in the car, though, Ponyboy tells Cherry that he would never have actually used the broken bottle. She responds that if she sees **Dally** again she just might fall in love with him.

Johnny's fear of Bob highlights the toll the violence between the gangs has already taken and foreshadows the confrontation between Bob, Ponyboy, and Johnny in the next chapter. Cherry's intervention in the brewing fight reflects her role as someone who can see the good in the individuals in both groups. Ponyboy's insistence that he would not use the bottle shows that he is not as hardened as some of the other greasers.



After the **Mustang** drives off, **Two-Bit** leaves **Johnny** and **Ponyboy** in the vacant lot where the greasers hang out. As they smoke and watch the stars, Pony voices his anger over the Socs' advantages in life and their mistreatment of the greasers. Johnny responds that he can't take much more of the conflict and contemplates committing suicide, then takes it back and instead wishes for a place where he could be free of the constant fighting. Ponyboy imagines a place in the countryside where his family could be happy and intact again. He imagines Johnny living with them and **Dally** benefiting from the kind attention of Ponyboy's mother. Ponyboy drifts off to sleep. After Johnny eventually shakes Ponyboy awake, Ponyboy hurries home.

Stargazing is a form of escape for Johnny and Ponyboy—the two of them are still young enough to try to daydream their way out of the gang conflict. Johnny's comment about suicide underscores both the seriousness of the problem and Johnny's own particular vulnerability. Ponyboy's vision of the country highlights his desire to return to a simpler state and to regain the childhood bliss that is slipping away from him in the wake of his parents' death and his growing involvement in the conflict with the Socs.



When **Ponyboy** gets home, **Darry** is furious at him for losing track of time and arriving so late. **Sodapop** tries to intervene, but Darry silences Soda and, losing control, slaps Ponyboy. Darry is immediately remorseful and tries to apologize, but Ponyboy runs out of the house before his brother can say anything

Darry is angry out of concern that Ponyboy's thoughtless behavior might get him hurt. But Ponyboy can't see things from Darry's side. Likewise, Darry's overwhelming rages shows that he can't understand Pony's point of view



Ponyboy returns to the greaser lot, where he finds **Johnny**, tells him what happened, and adds that he has decided to run away. Johnny agrees to join him, describing the abuse and neglect he faces at home. Johnny's home life makes Ponyboy realize that his own situation isn't actually so bad, though, and the boys decide to take a walk to the park and back before deciding whether to run away.

Ponyboy gets a better sense of his own family life through his new understanding of Johnny's much worse situation. The boys go to the park, a place for children, to decide whether to face or run away from their lives. But what they find in the park will change their lives and force them to grow up.



Chapter 4

The park is deserted. As **Johnny** and **Ponyboy** walk and talk, the blue **Mustang** suddenly appears. **Bob**, his friend **Randy**, and three other Socs jump out of the car. All of them are drunk. Johnny, terrified, pulls out his switchblade and Ponyboy wishes he had the broken bottle. Bob insults greasers by calling them white trash with long hair. Ponyboy, furious, responds that Socs are white trash with mustangs and madras (plaid) shirts, and spits at the Socs.

Ponyboy's desire for the broken bottle suggests that the conflict around him is making it harder for him to preserve his inclination towards nonviolence. Notice how, once again, when it comes to conflicts between the two gangs, the participants focus on the opposing gang's superficial characteristics.



The Socs attack. One forces **Ponyboy's** head underwater in a nearby fountain. Ponyboy blacks out. When he comes to, the Socs are gone and he's on the pavement next to **Johnny** and **Bob's** dead body. Johnny says, "I killed him." Johnny's switchblade is covered in blood.

Johnny and Ponyboy go from the youngest and most childish members of the greasers to people who have fought and killed Socs. They are forced to grow up in an instant. The question is how they'll deal with it.



Ponyboy panics, but **Johnny** is calm. He decides that they should go to **Dally** for help. They find Dally at a party at the house of Dally's rodeo partner, **Buck Merrill**. When he learns what's happened, Dally gives them warm clothes, fifty dollars, a loaded gun, and directions to a hide-out in an abandoned church in the small rural town of Windrixville. He asks Ponyboy if **Darry** and **Sodapop** know what happened. Ponyboy tells him not to say anything to Darry.

To society, Dally is a villain or thug, but he is incredibly generous and protective of his fellow greasers. Yet the fact that Johnny and Pony go to Dally rather than Darry indicates that the killing has pushed them in the direction of growing up to become more like Dally than like Darry.



Hidden in a boxcar on a train they've hopped to Windrixville, **Johnny** looks at Dally's gun and wonders why Dally gave it to him, saying he could never use it. For his part, **Ponyboy**, wearing the warm "hoodlum's jacket" that Dally gave him, can't believe that the two of them are fleeing a murder. He thinks about Johnny's kind quiet demeanor and marvels at the enormity of their current situation.

Dally's gun and "hoodlum's jacket" show how the conflict with the Socs (and Bob's killing in particular) is pushing Ponyboy and Johnny away from innocence and sensitivity toward Dally's much more hard-hearted and violent way of life.



At the Windrixville station, **Ponyboy** realizes how his and **Johnny's** appearance make them look like hoods. He misses home, and thinks about how his dream of moving to the country has come true but not in the way he planned it. As soon they find the abandoned church, they immediately drop off to sleep.

Ponyboy recognizes the difference between the way society will view him and Johnny, and who they really are as individuals. Also note how Ponyboy's childish dreams of a simpler life in the country have been dashed. Dashed dreams lead to hopelessness and hardness.



Chapter 5

Ponyboy awakens in the abandoned church. For a moment, he imagines he's at home spending a typical Saturday morning with his brothers. When he becomes fully alert, he sees a note from **Johnny**, who's gone out for supplies.

Ponyboy's waking dreams of being at home indicate that the three brothers do love and care for each other, despite the ongoing tensions between Ponyboy and Darry.



Johnny returns shortly with some food and a paperback copy of *Gone with the Wind*. Johnny also has bought some peroxide, and insists that they disguise themselves by cutting and dyeing their **hair**. Ponyboy is reluctant to change his hairstyle, which he says makes him look "tuff" and helps identify him as a greaser. He finally relents, but when he sees himself in a mirror, he feels miserable.

By cutting off the hair that identifies them as greasers, the boys are symbolically leaving the group. This is frightening because the group keeps them safe and gives them their identity. Yet, in time, leaving the group will provide the boys space to find themselves as individuals.



Later, **Ponyboy** and **Johnny** talk about killing **Bob**, and both of them cry out of fear and shock as they discuss the experience. They comfort each other and go back to sleep. When they wake up, both boys feel more relaxed and level-headed. Ponyboy says to Johnny, “We ain’t gonna cry no more, are we?”

After getting over the initial shock of the killing, the boys are able to numb themselves to the situation, as the older greasers do. As they become less sensitive to violence, they lose some of their childhood innocence.



Several days pass. The boys entertain themselves by playing poker and reading aloud from **Gone with the Wind**. **Johnny** admires the Southern gentlemen in the novel and says that they remind him of Dally. When **Ponyboy** doesn’t understand, Johnny tells about a time when Dally took the blame for a petty crime committed by **Two-Bit**. Ponyboy now understands Johnny’s deep admiration for Dally, but still feels intimidated by Dally’s intensity.

Though a law-breaker with a volatile temper, Dally is also a loyal and devoted greaser. Johnny’s story is a reminder that noble behavior does not reside only with those deemed heroes by society. Yet the comparison of Dally to the Southern gentleman doomed to die at war foreshadows Dally’s fate.



One morning, **Ponyboy** and Johnny watch the sunrise. As they lament that the sunrise’s beauty doesn’t last, Ponyboy recites the poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” by Robert Frost. They agree that the poem captures just what they feel, though Ponyboy can’t explain the poem’s meaning in words. Johnny comments that Ponyboy has made him see the beauty of nature more than he ever had before, and he notes how different Ponyboy is from the other members of his family. Ponyboy responds that Johnny, too, is different from the other gang members.

Ponyboy’s appreciation for beauty sets him apart from the other members of his family and gang. Being a Curtis brother is only part of Ponyboy’s identity, as is being a greaser. The poem expresses the boys’ desire to hold on to the beautiful things in life and the innocence of their youth, yet the fact that “nothing gold can stay” hints at how difficult it will be to stay hopeful and optimistic.



On the fifth day after **Bob’s** death, **Dally** pays the boys a visit. He brings **Ponyboy** a letter from **Sodapop**, in which Sodapop writes that Darry is worried for Ponyboy and very sorry for hitting him. Dally then drives them to a Dairy Queen for a meal. On the way, he tells them that he was questioned by the police and lied, saying that the perpetrators had headed for Texas. He adds that the Socs are furious about Bob’s death, that there’s been an increase in violence between the Socs and greasers, and that the two gangs are planning to have a “rumble” on the following night. Finally, he reveals that **Cherry** has been acting as a “spy” for the greasers.

Both Dally and the letter from Sodapop indicate Darry’s deep concern for Ponyboy’s welfare, but Ponyboy does not seem to take note of it. Dally’s care for the boys underscores his capacity for loyalty and self-sacrifice. Yet at the same time he accepts the conflict between the Socs and greasers without ever questioning its purpose or value. Dally, hardened as he is, is unable and unwilling to see past the differences that produce divided communities.



Chapter 6

As **Johnny** and **Ponyboy** devour a big meal at the Dairy Queen, **Dally** explains that **Cherry** felt responsible for a situation that resulted in **Bob’s** stabbing, so she offered to watch monitor the Socs’ preparations for the rumble and to testify that Johnny acted in self-defense.

Ponyboy doesn’t let the superficial differences between him and Cherry determine his opinion of her. Instead, he recognizes and admires Cherry’s sensitivity and independence of thought and action.



Johnny announces that he thinks he and **Ponyboy** should turn themselves in to the police. **Dally** tries to convince him otherwise, saying that he never wants Johnny to become hardened in the way that jail would harden him. Johnny responds that he thinks he has a good chance in a trial since he acted in self-defense, and that he feels guilty for worrying Ponyboy’s brothers. Dally agrees to drive the boys back to Tulsa.

The main drive behind Dally’s care for Johnny is revealed here: he wants to stop Johnny from growing up to be like him. While Dally himself has lost his innocence and hope for a better life, in a way he can still access those feelings by protecting and preserving them in Johnny.



As they drive past the church where they had been hiding, they see that it’s burning. A crowd is standing outside, and a bystander tells them that a school group was having a picnic there. A woman shouts that some of the children are missing inside the church. Suspecting that their discarded cigarette butts may have started the fire, **Ponyboy** and **Johnny** dash into the burning building. They find the children and lift them one-by-one out a window, continuing even after **Dally** runs in shouting that the roof is about to collapse. The roof collapses, just as they save the last child, and Johnny knocks Ponyboy through the window, saving him. Ponyboy hears Johnny scream behind him, but before he can go back Dally smacks him on the back and knocks him unconscious.

Though they are seen by society as misfits and hoodlums for being greasers, Ponyboy and Johnny’s first instinct is to take responsibility for the fire they may have caused. They exhibit great heroism by running into the burning building without a second thought. The act of saving the younger children also seems representative of the boys’ desire to protect and preserve the innocence of childhood, which they feel slipping away in themselves.



Ponyboy wakes up in an ambulance with **Jerry Wood**, a teacher and the bystander whom Ponyboy spoke with before rushing into the burning church. Jerry tells him what happened: **Dally** knocked Ponyboy out while smothering a fire that had caught on Ponyboy’s back. Dally then saved Johnny. He adds that Dally is burned but will be fine, while **Johnny** is in very bad condition. He praises the boys’ courage. Ponyboy responds that they’re greasers and that Johnny is wanted for murder. Jerry doesn’t know the term “greaser” and is surprised by this news about Johnny, but he continues to try to comfort Ponyboy as they head toward the hospital.

Jerry’s praise for the boys’ heroic acts and his complete ignorance about what a greaser is reveals the meaninglessness of the greaser identity to the world outside Tulsa. Jerry helps Ponyboy see that it is the boys’ courageous acts that speak for them, not their hair, group affiliation, or social class. Notice that while Dally’s actions were also heroic, he acted only to save the members of his gang, while Johnny and Ponyboy saved people they didn’t even know.



Ponyboy suffered only minor burns, and is soon discharged from the hospital. He sits in the waiting room with **Jerry**, worrying about **Dally** and **Johnny**, and finds himself telling Jerry the story of **Bob’s** murder. Jerry agrees that Johnny acted in self-defense and reassures him that the judge will also take into account the boys’ actions at the fire.

Jerry continues to treat Ponyboy with respect and kindness, despite learning of the boys’ role in Bob’s death. His treatment of Ponyboy is totally unaffected by the stereotypes that dominate the greasers’ life on the streets.



Soon **Sodapop** and **Darry** arrive. **Ponyboy** and Soda hug. Darry stands apart, and Ponyboy sees that Darry is crying. Suddenly Ponyboy understands that Darry’s harsh treatment of him results from his love and his concern for Ponyboy’s welfare. Ponyboy hugs Darry and apologizes to him, and has the feeling that everything will be okay once he returns home.

Ponyboy is finally able to see things from his brother’s point of view, signaling the beginning of a resolution to the conflict in the Curtis family. Ponyboy’s feeling that everything will turn out all right shows his continued hope and innocence.



Chapter 7

Ponyboy, **Darry**, and **Sodapop** wait in the hospital waiting room for news about **Johnny** and **Dally**. Reporters and police question and take photos of Ponyboy and his brothers. Sodapop charms the reporters with his good looks and sense of humor. Eventually, a doctor emerges. He says that Dally will be okay in a few days, but that Johnny’s back has been broken, and that if he survives he will be crippled for life. Ponyboy tries not to cry when he hears this news. He reflects that greasers are not supposed to cry, and that some of them have even forgotten how.

The bleak prognosis underscores Johnny’s vulnerability, in contrast to Dally’s ruggedness. Ponyboy’s struggle to hold back tears shows how greaser life can harden a boy, making him less sensitive to physical and emotional pain. Ponyboy seems aware of the expectation that he not break down, yet he cannot ignore his grief. His sensitivity is one of the traits that sets him apart from the other gang members.



The next morning, **Ponyboy** wakes up before his brothers and starts making breakfast. As he does, **Two-Bit** and **Steve Randle** drop by. They show him the morning paper, which contains an article with the headline “Juvenile Delinquents Turn Heroes.” Two-Bit objects to the verb “turn,” asserting that Ponyboy and Johnny were heroes all along. The article credits the boys with saving the children’s lives. The report also quotes **Cherry** and **Randy** regarding the killing of Bob—both of them insist that **Johnny** acted only in self-defense. The article finishes by saying that the Curtis boys should be allowed to stay together. But this final bit of news panics Ponyboy, who hadn’t realized that there was a chance that he and Sodapop might be separated from Darry.

The news article highlights the larger community’s failure to see the potential for heroism and honorable behavior among greasers. The community expects greasers to become criminals and delinquents. Since they have few other choices, many of these boys become exactly that. To some extent, Johnny and Ponyboy’s courageous actions overturn these expectations, yet even so the community may still decide that Darry is an unfit guardian and split up the Curtis family.



With **Sodapop** and **Darry** now in the kitchen too, **Ponyboy** shares the news that on the previous night he had one of his recurring nightmares, which he can only vaguely remember in the morning. Darry becomes very concerned. Ponyboy explains that the dreams began when the boys’ parents died, though they had lately seemed to taper off.

The recurrence of Ponyboy’s nightmares suggests that he is struggling emotionally to cope with the killing of Bob, the possibility of Johnny’s death, and the threat of separation from his brothers. Darry’s concern for Ponyboy suggests that the rift in the Curtis family is mending.



The conversation turns to **Sodapop’s** girlfriend **Sandy**, who suddenly moved to Florida to live with her grandmother. Soda is clearly upset, so Darry distracts him by saying that they need to get to work.

Sodapop and Sandy make up another divided community.



Ponyboy and **Two-Bit** go down to the Tasty Freeze to buy sodas. While there, the blue **Mustang** pulls into the parking lot. **Randy** emerges from the car and walks over. Ponyboy and Two-Bit brace for a fight, but Randy says he only wants to talk. As Randy and Ponyboy sit in the Mustang, Randy asks Ponyboy why he helped the kids in the burning church. He says he was surprised that a greaser would do something like that. Ponyboy responds that his actions had nothing to do with being a greaser, and suggests that Randy or any other individual might do the same. Randy then tells Ponyboy that he is tired of the gang violence and devastated by Bob's death, and says that he won't fight in the rumble. He tells Ponyboy about Bob's troubled family life, and describes Bob as a great friend with a bad temper. The conversation ends on good terms, and Ponyboy has a new understanding of the Socs' fundamental humanity.

Chapter 8

Two-Bit and **Ponyboy** go to the hospital. First, they visit **Johnny**, who is very weak. Johnny asks for a copy of **Gone with the Wind**, and Two-Bit goes to the drugstore to get it for him. Alone with Ponyboy, Johnny says that he's not ready to die, that he hasn't had enough time or enough opportunities yet in his life. A nurse comes in to say that **Johnny's mother** has come to visit. Johnny, who never felt any real love from his mother, refuses to see her, then passes out.

Ponyboy and **Two-Bit** next visit **Dally**. He is in good shape, but is unhappy that he'll have to miss the rumble that night. He asks about **Johnny's** condition, and is visibly upset when **Two-Bit** reluctantly tells him the truth. Dally asks for Two-Bit's prized switchblade, and Two-Bit gives it to him without asking any questions. Dally then says that it's essential that the greasers win the rumble, in honor of Johnny.

As they wait for a bus home, **Two-Bit** observes that **Ponyboy** looks pretty sick. Ponyboy asks him not to mention it to **Darry**, and Two-Bit agrees. On the bus, Two-Bit observes that Darry is stricter with Ponyboy than his parents had been. The two agree that, but for his associations with the gang, Darry could be a soc.

Ponyboy then tells **Two-Bit** that he has a bad feeling about the rumble. Two-Bit mocks Ponyboy for being afraid, but Ponyboy responds that he's not afraid for himself, he's afraid that another tragedy will occur. Two-Bit shrugs off Ponyboy's concerns, and hopes the greasers win a big victory over the Socs.

Cherry Valance is at the vacant lot in her Corvette when **Two-Bit** and **Ponyboy** arrive. She tells them that the Socs plan to play by greaser rules during the rumble and not use weapons. Ponyboy asks her if she'll visit Johnny in the hospital. She responds that she can't because Johnny killed Bob. Incensed, Ponyboy accuses Cherry of being a traitor, but when she says how hard **Bob's** death has been on her and describes Bob's good qualities, Ponyboy asks for her forgiveness. He asks Cherry whether she can see the **sunset** well from the West Side. She says she can. He says that he can still see it from the East Side, too.

The conversation between Ponyboy and Randy touches on many of the novel's important themes. Ponyboy insists on the heroic capacity of every person—Soc, greaser, or otherwise. He empathizes with Randy, who has lost his best friend, as well as Bob, whom Randy portrays as a spoiled kid. They begin to see each other as individuals rather than representatives of rival gangs. The connection established in this conversation transforms both boys' understandings of the opposing group. It underscores the importance of empathy to the resolution of the conflict between the two gangs.

Johnny's lament about his too short life mirrors the themes of the poem *Nothing Gold Can Stay*. Johnny was gold, and it was the gold in his nature that led him to save the children in the fire. But those actions also resulted in the injuries that will either kill or paralyze him.

While Johnny is upset about the opportunities he will miss out on in life, Dally is upset about missing the rumble. Johnny, with his innocence still intact, had grand hopes for his life. Dally, hardened by life, thinks only about fighting Socs and protecting Johnny.

The conversation about Darry highlights the power and superficiality of the social distinctions between Socs and greasers. Though Darry has many Soc qualities, because he's a greaser his life is defined by the opportunities available to greasers.

Two-Bit sees the rumble solely as a greaser. But Ponyboy now recognizes that everyone in both groups is an individual. His fear is not for himself, but that any one of these individuals might get hurt or killed.

Ponyboy's conversation with Cherry details the complication of being an individual within a group. Ponyboy wants Cherry to be loyal solely to the greasers, but Cherry can't be because she is a Soc and Bob's girlfriend. She also further helps Ponyboy to see Bob as an individual. Their exchange about the sunset shows the common ground of the two groups, as well as the hope both characters have for a better future for themselves and their friends.



Chapter 9

The Curtis brothers prepare for the rumble by putting on nice clothes and slicking their **hair**. **Ponyboy**, still feeling ill and out of it, takes five aspirin while no one's looking.

Joined by **Steve** and **Two-Bit**, the Curtis brothers head to the rumble. **Ponyboy** still has a bad feeling about the rumble, and as they walk he thinks about why people fight in general, and in particular why his brothers and friends want to fight in the rumble: "Soda fought for fun, Steve for hatred, Darry for pride, and Two-Bit for conformity." Ponyboy decides that self-defense is actually the only good reason to fight.

The greasers arrive at the vacant lot and find **Tim Shepard's** gang already there, along with another group from a suburb called Brumly. **Ponyboy** studies the boys from the other greaser gangs, and realizes that these boys are all "future convicts," and that his own brothers and friends are not. He looks over at **Darry**, and knows that Darry will work his way out of the street life. Ponyboy vows to do the same. When Tim Shepard congratulates Ponyboy on the killing of **Bob**, Ponyboy pretends to be proud.

22 Socs arrive to fight the 20 greasers already there. As **Ponyboy** observes the Socs' preppy clothes, he reflects that their clean-cut looks mask some of the Socs' actual meanness, while the greasers' looks mask many of the boys' kindness and sensitivity.

Darry offers to take on any Soc. A Soc steps forward whom Ponyboy recognizes as a boy named **Paul Holden**, a former friend of Darry's on the high school football team, who had gone on to college while Darry had been forced to work.

Just as the rumble begins, **Dally** runs in to join the fight. He used Two-Bit's switchblade to force his way out of the hospital.

The fight is brutal. **Ponyboy** suffers numerous injuries, and is about to pass out when he hears a voice yelling that the Socs have fled. Despite their bruises, cuts, and broken bones, the greasers rejoice over their win.

Dally grabs **Ponyboy** and insists that they rush to the hospital to tell the news to **Johnny**, whose condition is now critical. Dally drives **Buck Merrill's** car so fast that a policeman stops him. He makes up a lie that Ponyboy fell off of his motorcycle, and the officer, seeing Ponyboy's injured state, believes his story and escorts them to the hospital.

As he drives, **Dally** says that if **Ponyboy** and **Johnny** just got tough like him, nothing could hurt them anymore. They would not have rushed into that fire, for example.

At the hospital, the boys run to **Johnny's** room. A doctor tells them that Johnny is dying, and **Dally** threatens him with **Two-Bit's** switchblade, fearing that the doctor won't let them in. The doctor replies that he'll let them see Johnny because they're his friends, not because of the knife.

Dally excitedly tells **Johnny** the news about the rumble, but Johnny replies, "Useless fighting's no good." Dally then tells Johnny how proud everyone is of his actions at the fire, and Johnny's eyes glow. Johnny musters the strength to say one last thing, to Ponyboy: "Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold." He dies. Dally, grief-stricken, runs from the hospital.

The greasers accentuate their group look to strengthen their solidarity. Ponyboy hides his illness so he can help the greasers and fight in the rumble.

Though Ponyboy goes along with the gang, his reservations about fighting persist. His thoughts perceptively explain all of the reasons why individuals give themselves up to the goals of a larger group.

The behavior of the other gang members shows Pony that his own brothers and friends may look like hoods and criminals, but aren't criminals at all. Through Darry, he comes to see that he could have a bright future. Yet at the same time, Pony still isn't strong enough in his convictions to tell Tim that he isn't proud of killing Bob.

Ponyboy is now able to look past the outward appearance of the two groups and see the truth beneath.

The confrontation between Paul and Darry exemplifies the opportunity gap between Socs and greasers, and it shows how easily individual friendships can be altered by gang allegiance.

Dally's intense allegiance to his friends and enjoyment of a fight is reflected in the disregard for his health he shows by escaping from the hospital.

The violence of the gangs' conflict is depicted in graphic detail.

Because the gang conflict is all that he has, Dally believes that news of the greaser's win will make Johnny happy. Though Dally is wrong, his desire to make Johnny happy in Johnny's last moments is sincere.

Dally's right: becoming hardened would protect Ponyboy from feeling pain, but at the cost of the most idealistic and noble parts of his nature.

Dally sees violence as the only way to get anything. The doctor's response shows that Dally is wrong.

Johnny's dying words contradict Dally's message to Ponyboy in the car. In telling Pony to "stay gold," he is telling him to preserve his idealism and sensitivity and engage with the world rather than to hide from the world by hardening himself to it.



Chapter 10

Ponyboy wanders the hospital and then the streets. Eventually, a concerned stranger offers to drive him home. At home, **Ponyboy** tells the other greasers about Johnny's death and Dally's disappearance. The phone rings. **Darry** picks up the phone—it's Dally. He tells Darry that he's just robbed a grocery store and is on the run from the police and needs help. The boys hurry to the vacant lot to pick Dally up. Through all this, Ponyboy dizziness and weakness intensifies.

None of the greasers are surprised that Dally has become self-destructive after Johnny's death, because Johnny was the only thing that Dally loved and valued in his life. Yet notice how the greasers immediately drop everything to try to help Dally.



The boys reach the vacant lot just as **Dally** does. Simultaneously, a police car pulls up across the street. **Dally** pulls out a gun that his friends know he keeps unloaded and uses as a bluff in fights. But the police don't know the gun isn't loaded. They shoot Dally, killing him. **Ponyboy** realizes that Dally wanted to die.

Dally's hope that Johnny's life would turn out better than his own was all he had left in life. Becoming hardened may protect you from life's pain, but it leaves you nothing but a shell.



Ponyboy remembers all of the good things that **Dally** did to protect and help his fellow greasers. Ponyboy also reflects on how anyone who isn't a greaser and doesn't know Dally personally won't ever know about all of Dally's selfless actions. Then Ponyboy passes out.

Ponyboy is developing an independent point of view: Dally's tragedy is partially of Dally's own making, but also comes from society's insistence on seeing Dally only as a hoodlum.



Ponyboy wakes up at home. He learns from **Darry** and **Sodapop** that he suffered a concussion during the rumble and that he was delirious in the hospital and then unconscious for three days, and that they stayed by his bedside nearly the entire time.

The mutual care and concern among the Curtis boys is evident here.



Ponyboy also learns that **Johnny** left him his copy of **Gone with the Wind**, but the book and its Southern gentlemen remind him of Dally and he decides never to finish it.

In avoiding reading Gone with the Wind Pony is trying to avoid the deaths of Johnny and Dally, rather than acknowledge them.



Chapter 11

Ponyboy stays in bed for a week. Flipping through one of **Sodapop's** old yearbooks one day, he comes across **Bob's** picture. He wonders how Bob's parents are coping with his death, and thinks about what Bob was like as a person. He puts the aspects of Bob that he saw together with the things that **Cherry** and **Randy** told him about their friend, and decides that Bob was cocky, quick to anger, and scared. Above all, he decides, Bob was human.

In trying to see things through Bob's eyes, Ponyboy acknowledges the humanity of his former enemy, a first step to rising above the conflict that has caused so much devastation in both greasers' and Socs' lives.



One day, **Randy** comes to visit **Ponyboy**. He says that he feels like he let down his father by his involvement with **Bob** in the attack on Ponyboy and **Johnny**, and he tells Ponyboy that he plans to tell the truth at the hearing the next day. Randy seems genuinely worried when Ponyboy tells him of his fear that the brothers will be split up. When he tries to reassure Ponyboy by telling him that he didn't do anything criminal, Ponyboy insists that he, and not Johnny, was the one who killed Bob. Randy tries to reason with him, and Ponyboy then denies that Johnny is dead. **Darry** comes in and suggests that Randy leave, saying in a low voice that **Ponyboy** is still having difficulty coping with his concussion and **Johnny's** death.

Randy shows compassion and maturity in his decision to visit Ponyboy. He demonstrates empathy in his concern over the Curtis brothers' potential separation. Randy also has the capacity to think for himself and seems willing to take a path that might diverge from that of his fellow gang members. Ponyboy, however, is in full denial over Johnny's death.



Chapter 12

The hearing is the following day. Because of Ponyboy's condition, the judge doesn't question him about anything other than his home life. Randy and **Cherry** testify that **Johnny** killed Bob in self-defense. The judge acquits Ponyboy and sends him home with his brothers.

With the court's decision and Randy and Cherry's testimony, it seems as if the two main conflicts in the novel have been resolved. All should be well...



Ponyboy, however, suffers aftereffects from his concussion that give him balance and memory problems. In addition, he finds that emotionally he doesn't care about much of anything, and it's difficult for him to get through each day. Ponyboy's grades suffer, and he once again begins arguing with **Darry**, who constantly has to scold him to do his homework.

...Yet all is not well for Ponyboy. He becomes depressed in the aftermath of Johnny and Dally's death, which he still refuses to cope with and accept. This depression creates new rifts in his home life with Darry, which seemed to have been healed.



Ponyboy's English teacher offers him a deal: though his work for the semester merits a failing grade, the teacher offers Ponyboy a "C" if he can write a good final "theme" paper for the semester. The teacher lets Ponyboy choose his topic and asks that the essay be based not on research but on Ponyboy's own experiences and thoughts.

The English essay offers Ponyboy an opportunity to express the independent thoughts that have been rolling around in his head over the course of these chaotic few weeks.



At lunch that day, **Ponyboy**, **Two-Bit**, and **Steve** go to a neighborhood store for candy and soda. While there, three Socs confront Pony and accuse him of killing **Bob**. Ponyboy, feeling nothing, neither fear nor anger, breaks the glass soda bottle he's holding and threatens the Socs with the jagged end until they back off. Afterwards, a concerned Two-Bit cautions Ponyboy not to get tough like the rest of the gang, saying that it's not Ponyboy's true nature. Ponyboy silently responds that he needs to get tough or he'll get hurt. He then bends down to pick up the shards of glass from the ground to make sure no one gets a flat tire. Two-Bit laughs, seeming relieved.

This scene shows how easy it would be for Pony to develop the defenses and instincts of the older greasers, and to become hard and violent. Where early in the novel he assured Cherry that he would never use the broken bottle, now he seems perfectly willing to use it. Yet when Pony picks up the broken glass, he signals that Two-Bit is right and that his gentle, sensitive nature isn't dead.



That night, **Ponyboy** and **Darry** get into a shouting match over Ponyboy's unwritten essay and his recent lack of motivation. Suddenly, **Sodapop** runs out of the house, dropping a letter that Sandy had returned to him unopened. Darry explains that **Sandy** moved to Florida because she was pregnant, but the father of her baby wasn't Sodapop. Soda had offered to marry her anyway, but she turned him down. Ponyboy feels badly that, due to his own self-absorption, he never even talked with Sodapop about Sandy. Darry and Pony run out after Sodapop.

Ponyboy realizes that he has been so wrapped up in himself lately that he has not taken the time to think about Sodapop's feelings. He has not returned the support, compassion, or empathy that Sodapop has continually given him.



Ponyboy and **Darry** catch up with **Sodapop** in the park. Soda tells them that their fighting is tearing him apart. He says that he can see both sides of the conflict: Darry's hard work and sacrifice, and Ponyboy's inability to deal with Darry's constant criticism. Sodapop begs Darry and Ponyboy to stick together, and they agree to try. The three brothers then race home, but nobody wins. "I guess we all just wanted to stay together," Ponyboy observes.

Sodapop's breakdown forces Darry and Ponyboy to confront the consequences of their continuous fighting, and to see each other more clearly. That their race home ends in a tie represents their commitment to remaining unified from this point forward.



Back at home, **Ponyboy** picks up **Johnny's** copy of *Gone with the Wind* while trying to write his essay. A letter from Johnny falls out of the book. In the letter, Johnny urges Ponyboy to "stay gold," to keep watching the sunsets and appreciating the world as if it were new. The letter reminds Ponyboy to remember that he has a lot to live for, and adds that saving the lives of the children in the church was worth his own life. Finally, he tells Ponyboy to pass these ideas on to Dally, who needs to understand them. Suddenly, Ponyboy realizes his essay topic: he wants to tell the story of the greasers so that people won't be so quick to judge, and so that all the other hoodlums in the world like Dally, won't hold onto their anger at the world and will instead see the beauty in it. Ponyboy writes the first sentence of his essay, which is the first sentence of the novel *The Outsiders*.

In picking up Gone with the Wind and finding the letter, Pony comes to terms with Johnny's death. As a result, he finds Johnny's letter, and the letter pushes Ponyboy to the next step: to see that his own situation is similar to that of so many other people in the world, and that he can do more than just struggle to "stay gold" himself. He can help the world "stay gold" by telling his story—and that of all the outsiders in the world—so that people start seeing them as individuals. In writing his essay, Ponyboy embraces an independent voice and perspective, and moves beyond his identity as a greaser without giving up all that his past has taught him.



Important Quotes

Chapter 1 Quotes

When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home.

Greasers can't walk alone too much or they'll get jumped, or someone will come by and scream "Greaser!" at them...We get jumped by the Socs. I'm not sure how you spell it, but it's the abbreviation for the Socials, the jet set, the West-side rich kids. It's like the term "greaser," which is used to class all us boys on the East Side.

I don't care, I lied to myself, I don't care about [Darry] either. Soda's enough, and I'd have him until I got out of school. I don't care about Darry. But I was still lying and I knew it. I lie to myself all the time. But I never believe me.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Johnny never walked by himself after that. And Johnny...now carried in his back pocket a six-inch switchblade. He'd use it, too, if he ever got jumped again.

"Things are rough all over."

I really couldn't see what Socs would have to sweat about—good grades, good cars, good girls, madras and Mustangs and Corvairs—Man, I thought, if I had worries like that I'd consider myself lucky. I know better now.

Chapter 3 Quotes

It seemed funny that the sunset [Cherry] saw from her patio and the one I saw from the back steps was the same one. Maybe the two worlds we lived in weren't so different. We saw the same sunset.

It wasn't fair for the Socs to have everything. We were as good as they were; it wasn't our fault we were greasers...I felt the tension growing inside of me and I knew something had to happen or I would explode.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"You know what a greaser is" Bob asked. "White trash with long hair..."
 "You know what a Soc is?" I said, my voice shaking with rage. "White trash with Mustangs and madras."

Chapter 5 Quotes

Nature's first green is gold,
 Her hardest hue to hold.
 Her early leaf's a flower;
 But only so an hour.
 Then leaf subsides to leaf.
 So Eden sank to grief,
 So dawn goes down to day.
 Nothing gold can stay. – Robert Frost

Chapter 6 Quotes

"Johnny," Dally said in a pleading, high voice, using a tone I had never heard from him before, "Johnny, I ain't mad at you. I just don't want you to get hurt. You don't know what a few months in jail can do to you. Oh, blast it, Johnny...you get hardened in jail. I don't want that to happen to you. Like it happened to me..."

That was [Darry's] silent fear then—of losing another person he loved. I remembered how close he and Dad had been, and I wondered how I could ever have thought him hard and unfeeling. I listened to his heart pounding through his T-shirt and I knew everything was going to be okay now. I had taken the long way around, but I was finally home. To stay.

Chapter 7 Quotes

I stared at the newspaper. On the front page of the second section was the headline: JUVENILE DELINQUENTS TURN HEROES.

"What I like is the 'turn' bit," Two-Bit said. ... "Y'all were heroes from the beginning. You just didn't 'turn' all of a sudden."

"You would have saved those kids if you had been there," I said. "You'd have saved them the same as we did."

"Thanks, grease," he said, trying to grin. Then he stopped. "I didn't mean that. I meant, thanks, kid."

"My name's Ponyboy," I said. "Nice talking to you, Randy."

Socs were just guys after all. Things were rough all over, but it was better that way. That way you could tell the other guy was human, too.

Chapter 8 Quotes

"Hey," I said suddenly, "can you see the sunset real good from the West Side?"

She blinked, startled, then smiled. "Real good."

"You can see it good from the East Side, too," I said quietly.

"Thanks, Ponyboy." She smiled through her tears. "You dig okay."

Chapter 9 Quotes

Soda fought for fun, Darry for pride, and Two-Bit for conformity. Why do I fight? I thought, and couldn't think of any real good reason. There isn't any real good reason for fighting except self-defense.

They used to be buddies, I thought, they used to be friends, and now they hate each other because one has to work for a living and the other comes from the West Side. They shouldn't hate each other...I don't hate the Socs anymore...they shouldn't hate...

"We won," Dally panted. "We beat the Socs. We stomped them—chased them outa our territory."

Johnny didn't even try to grin at him. "Useless...fighting's no good..."

"Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold..." The pillow seemed to sink a little, and Johnny died.

Chapter 10 Quotes

And even as the policemen's guns spit fire into the night I knew that was what Dally wanted... Dally Winston wanted to be dead and he always got what he wanted...Two friends of mine had died that night: one a hero, the other a hoodlum. But I remembered Dally pulling Johnny through the window of the burning church; Dally giving us his gun, although it could mean jail for him; Dally risking his life for us, trying to keep Johnny out of trouble. And now he was a dead juvenile delinquent and there wouldn't be any editorials in his favor. Dally didn't die a hero. He died violent and young and desperate, just like we all knew he'd die someday...But Johnny was right. He died gallant.

Chapter 11 Quotes

I had never given Bob much thought—I hadn't had time to think. But that day I wondered about him. What was he like? ... I looked at Bob's picture and I could begin to see the person we had killed. A reckless, hot-tempered boy, cocky and scared stiff at the same time.

Chapter 12 Quotes

"Ponyboy, listen, don't get tough. You're not like the rest of us and don't try to be."

"We're all we have left. We ought to be able to stick together against everything. If we don't have each other, we don't have anything. If you don't have anything, you end up like Dallas...and I don't mean dead, either. I mean like he was before. And that's worse than dead. Please"—he wiped his eyes on his arm—"don't fight anymore."

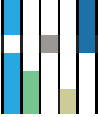
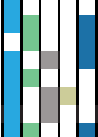
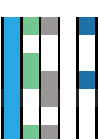
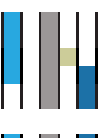







I've been thinking about it, and that poem, that guy that wrote it, he meant you're gold when you're a kid, like green. When you're a kid everything's new, dawn. It's just when you get used to everything that it's day. Like the way you dig sunsets, Pony. That's gold. Keep that way, it's a good way to be...And don't be so bugged over being a greaser. You still have a lot of time to make yourself what you want. There's still lots of good in the world. Tell Dally. I don't think he knows. Your buddy, Johnny.

Suddenly it wasn't only a personal thing to me. I could picture hundreds of boys living on the wrong sides of cities, boys with black eyes who jumped at their own shadows. Hundreds of boys who maybe watched sunsets and looked at the stars and ached for something better. I could see boys going down under street lights because they were mean and tough and hated the world, and it was too late to tell them there was still good in it...There should be some help, someone to tell them before it was too late. Someone should tell their side of the story, and maybe people would understand then and wouldn't be so quick to judge a boy by the amount of hair oil he wore.






One week had taken all three of them. And I decided I could tell people, beginning with my English teacher. I wondered for a long time how to start that theme, how to start writing about something that was important to me. And I finally began like this: When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home...

ThemeTracker™

The LitCharts ThemeTracker is a mini-version of the entire LitChart. The ThemeTracker provides a quick timeline-style rundown of all the important plot points and allows you to track the themes throughout the work at a glance.

Themes	Chapter
	<p>Back-story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Curtis children lose their parents in an auto accident. – Darry turns down a college scholarship to care for his brothers. – Johnny is badly beaten up by the Socs.
	<p>1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Walking home from the movies, Ponyboy is jumped by Socs. – Darry scolds Ponyboy for walking alone and not using his head.
	<p>2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ponyboy and Johnny go to the drive-in with Dally. – Dally harasses two Soc girls: Cherry and Marcia. – Ponyboy becomes friends with Cherry and, for the first time, sees the human side of the Socs. – On the way home, Bob and his Soc friends confront Ponyboy, Johnny, and Two-Bit. Cherry defuses the situation.
	<p>3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ponyboy gets home late. – Darry, scared about Ponyboy's welfare, shouts at and hits Ponyboy. – Ponyboy runs out of the house.
	<p>4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ponyboy and Johnny go to the Park. Bob and other Socs attack them. – Johnny kills Bob. – Dally helps Ponyboy and Johnny escape to Windrixville.
	<p>5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ponyboy and Johnny cut their hair as they hide out in an abandoned church in the countryside. – Ponyboy and Johnny marvel at the sunrise and discuss the poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay." – Dally comes to visit.
	<p>6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ponyboy and Johnny, aided by Dally, rescue schoolchildren from the burning church. – At the hospital, Ponyboy understands how much Darry loves him, and learns that Johnny is badly, perhaps fatally, injured.
	<p>7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The newspapers proclaim Johnny and Ponyboy heroes. – Randy tells Ponyboy that he will not fight in the rumble.
	<p>8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ponyboy and Two-Bit visit Johnny in the hospital and bring him <i>Gone with the Wind</i>. – They also visit Dally. Two-Bit gives Dally his switchblade when Dally asks for it. – Ponyboy talks with Cherry about Bob, and they reaffirm their common love of sunsets.
	<p>9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The greasers win the rumble, but Ponyboy is increasingly convinced that such fighting is useless. – Dally rushes with Ponyboy to the hospital to tell Johnny of their victory. Johnny is unimpressed. – Johnny tells Ponyboy to "stay gold" and dies. – Darry runs out of the hospital room.
	<p>10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dally commits suicide by provoking the police with an unloaded gun and getting shot. – Ponyboy passes out and his brothers take care of him.
	<p>11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ponyboy looks at Bob's yearbook picture and sees him as a human being. Randy visits Ponyboy. Ponyboy becomes delirious and claims that he killed Bob.
	<p>12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – At a hearing, a judge clears Johnny and Ponyboy of wrongdoing. – Sodapop begs Ponyboy and Darry not to fight anymore. – Ponyboy writes an English essay about his story and the deaths of Johnny, Dally, and Bob.

Theme Key

-  Divided Communities
-  Empathy
-  Preserving Childhood Innocence
-  Self-Sacrifice and Honor
-  Individual Identity