Fourteen-year-old Ponyboy Curtis is smart and thoughtful. He lives on the wrong side of the tracks with his two brothers, Darry and Sodapop. The Curtis brothers are part of a gang known as “greasers,” boys who slick their hair and smoke cigarettes and get into some petty crime. Greasers have a long-time feud going with the Socials or “Socs,” a gang composed of wealthy, privileged kids.

Ever since their mother and father died in a fatal car accident, Ponyboy and his two brothers—handsome, foolish Sodapop and stern, serious Darry—live together and take care of each other. Only 20 years old, Darry is forced to abandon a football scholarship and work full-time to provide for his younger brothers.

When Ponyboy and Johnny, the two most timid members of the gang, end up involved in the murder of a Soc boy named Bob, the two flee to an abandoned church in the country to hide out, unwittingly embarking on a journey of friendship, tragedy, bravery, and wisdom.

S. E. Hinton grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She completed The Outsiders at the age of 16. The novel was published four years later and made into a movie in 1983. Her other books include That Was Then, This Is Now; Rumble Fish; and Tex.

As students read The Outsiders, have them think about the pressure to be loyal to a group, whether greaser or Soc, while trying to be true to oneself.

USING THIS READING GUIDE

This reading guide presents lessons to support the teaching of the novel The Outsiders. Organized by sections of grouped chapters, the lessons preview key vocabulary words and include close reading questions tied to the Common Core State Standards. The lessons identify a key passage in each section that will help you guide students through an exploration of the essential ideas, events, and character development in The Outsiders. This passage will also serve as the jumping-off point from which students will engage in their own StudySyncTV–style group discussion.

Each section of the reading guide also includes a list of comparative texts—provided in the The Outsiders Full-text Unit on StudySync—that go along with that section. For each comparative text, the reading guide includes important contextual notes and ideas for relating the text to The Outsiders.
CHAPTER 1: Never Walk Alone
Ponyboy Curtis is walking home from a movie when members of the Socs gang attack him. Ponyboy's older brothers Darry and Sodapop rescue him before he is seriously hurt, but he is cut in the scuffle. We meet the other greasers: Two-Bit, the joker; Steve, Sodapop’s best friend; Dally, a hardened hoodlum; and Johnny, kind and timid. At home, Darry yells at Sodapop for walking home alone.

CHAPTER 2: Drive-in Confessions
Ponyboy and Johnny meet Dally at a drive-in movie and they sit behind two Soc girls, Cherry and Marcia. After Dally leaves, Cherry confides to Ponyboy that she sort of admires Dally. Two-Bit arrives and he and Marcia hit it off. Ponyboy and Cherry find common ground in their enjoyment of sunsets. Cherry perceives that Johnny has been hurt before, and Ponyboy describes when Johnny was nearly beaten to death. Cherry reminds Ponyboy that “things are rough all over” for Socs and greasers.

CHAPTERS 3-4: Sunrise to Sunset
Ponyboy, Johnny, and Two-Bit offer the girls a ride home, but their boyfriends arrive and the girls stop a fight by leaving with the Socs. Ponyboy and Johnny lie in the park, looking at the stars and dreaming of a world in which violence and stereotypes don’t exist. Ponyboy wakes around 2:00 a.m., and goes home. Darry, furious, slaps him and Ponyboy runs off to find Johnny. The two walk around the park and encounter the Soc boyfriends, who attack them. When one tries to drown Ponyboy in the park fountain. Johnny stabs and kills him. The two boys go to Dally for help, and he gives them a gun, some cash, and the directions to an abandoned church in the country.
CHAPTER 5: Nothing Gold Can Stay

Ponyboy and Johnny spend about five days in the church. They eat nothing but baloney sandwiches, read *Gone with the Wind* out loud, and cut their hair to mask their identities. One day, as they watch a sunrise together, Ponyboy recites the Robert Frost poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” Dally visits and takes the two out to a diner, where he tells them the greasers and Socs are planning a huge rumble in the coming days.

CHAPTER 6: Fire!

At the diner, Johnny says he wants to turn himself in but Dally warns that jail will break him. They arrive back at the church to find the building is on fire. Some kids from a school picnic are trapped in the building, and Ponyboy and Johnny run in to save them. They rescue the children, but Johnny is pinned down inside. Dally runs in to save him and Ponyboy blacks out, later waking up in an ambulance with one of the children’s teachers, who calls the boys “heroes.” At the hospital, Dally is in bad condition and Johnny is worse. As Ponyboy waits, Darry and Sodapop arrive. Ponyboy sees Darry crying and realizes that Darry yells at him only because he loves him.

CHAPTERS 7-9: A Rumble and a Death

The next day, Ponyboy reads in the local paper about how he and Johnny are heroes. He and Two-bit go out and encounter Randy, one of the Socs who jumped Ponyboy and who tells him now that he is tired of the violence and won’t be at the rumble. Two-Bit and Ponyboy visit Johnny, who has broken his back and is paralyzed, but tells Ponyboy that he doesn’t want to die. That night, Darry starts the rumble by taking the first punch. Dally escapes the hospital to join the rumble, too, and the greasers ultimately win. Dally then drags Ponyboy to the hospital to see Johnny, who tells the two that the fighting is useless. He tells Ponyboy to “stay gold” and dies. Dally is distraught and runs off.
CHAPTERS 10-11: Dally Gets What He Wants

Ponyboy returns home to the gang and tells them that Johnny is dead. They get a call from Dally. He has robbed a grocery store and needs help. The gang sees that the cops have Dally surrounded. He raises a gun that he doesn't keep loaded but the cops don't know that and they shoot him dead. Ponyboy believes Dally wanted to be killed. He faints and regains consciousness at home days later. Randy comes to visit him and they discuss the upcoming hearing about the murder of the Soc. Fearing the judge will decide that Darry is an unfit guardian and put him and Sodapop into a home, Ponyboy denies that Johnny killed the Soc, saying he did it instead, and then denies Johnny's death.

CHAPTER 12: Paul Newman and a Ride Home

At the hearing, all the Socs testify that Johnny killed in self-defense. The psychologist who has been examining Ponyboy talks to the judge about his state of mind. Ponyboy answers questions about his home life, and he and Sodapop are allowed to stay with Darry. But Ponyboy is having problems in school. His English teacher tells him he'll only pass if he does well on a writing assignment. One night, Ponyboy discovers a note Johnny wrote urging him not to become jaded by the negative aspects of life. When Ponyboy sits down to write his theme, he decides to write about Bob (the dead Soc), Johnny, and Dally. He needs to tell their side of the story in order to help end class warfare. He begins his theme the way The Outsiders starts: “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 . . .”
CHAPTER 1: NEVER WALK ALONE

KEY PASSAGE  |  Chapter 1, Paragraph 5

In this passage, Ponyboy compares the Socs and the greasers. He sees the Socs as a socially privileged gang that commits violence against the greasers for the fun of it and is bashed and then praised in the newspapers. As a greaser, Ponyboy admits that greasers adopt a tough look, commit crimes, and get into fights, but he points out that he and his brother, Sodapop, have promised their older brother Darry that they’ll stay out of trouble. Their parents died in a car crash and the brothers risk being separated if they mess up.

WHY IT’S KEY

**Theme:** *The Outsiders* begins by introducing one of its biggest themes: the injustice inherent in a society divided by class. From the first sentence, Ponyboy, the narrator, explains that greasers are poor and the Socs are rich. He also begins to describe the ways in which being rich allows the Socs to slide out of sticky situations. Even if they do reckless and hurtful things, Ponyboy claims, the Socs’ wealth and social status means that they can be “a public disgrace one day and an asset to society the next.” Greasers, on the other hand, have to be careful not to get caught; for Ponyboy and his brothers, getting caught would mean the dissolution of the family unit.

**Character:** In this passage, Ponyboy reveals himself to be the “outsider” of the title. Although most greasers drive souped-up cars, get in fights, and steal, Ponyboy does not. Furthermore, he doesn’t use the term “we” very often in describing the conduct of the greasers, suggesting that he doesn’t associate himself with them entirely. Ponyboy also seems to judge the Socs and the greasers objectively, that is, from an outsider’s perspective. He says, “I’m not saying either Socs or greasers are better,” which indicates a more impartial view of the two groups. So although the greasers may be the “outsiders” of the social sphere, Ponyboy himself is an outsider on a psychological level.

**Setting:** Ponyboy takes time in this passage to describe the “look” of people. By describing the souped-up cars, the gas stations, and the style of hair and dress, the reader is able to vividly picture a low-class neighborhood in 1960s America, where teens with leather jackets seemingly run the streets.
Discussion Prompt: How does Ponyboy’s point of view influence how events in this passage are described? What can you determine about Ponyboy’s character based on the way he talks about the Socs and the greasers? Do you think this description would sound different if one of his brother’s was narrating? How so?


VOCABULARY

undisturbed
un•dis•tur•bed adjective
Not bothered, left alone
I tiptoed out of the room, leaving the sleeping baby alone, undisturbed.

decent
de•cent adjective
Conforming to standards of good manners and morality; modest
The student’s bad behavior shocked the principal, who had previously thought him a decent kid.

editorial
ed•i•to•ri•al noun
An essay or article in a newspaper or magazine that gives the opinions of its author
After the big football game, the local paper praised the rival teams’ good sportsmanship in an editorial.

smarting
smart•ing verb
Experiencing sharp pain
After scoring the winning goal with an impressive header, Leah complained that her forehead was smarting.

jumped
jumped verb
Ambushed; attacked by surprise
She explained that she jumped the burglar as he was coming out the basement door.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: How does the girl in Ponyboy’s class react when he uses a switchblade to dissect a worm? How does Ponyboy feel, and what does this reveal about his character?
Sample Answer: The girl reacts by gasping and accusing him of being a hood. Ponyboy is upset and regrets his actions, because he doesn’t like being embarrassed; plus he thinks the girl is cute. Ponyboy’s regret reveals him to be a person with a conscience and a social consciousness.
Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 2: Reread the paragraph in which Ponyboy describes Two-Bit at length. What are some of the words and phrases he uses that sound the way a teen might actually talk at that time?
Sample Answer: “You couldn’t shut up that guy,” “He just went for kicks,” “I liked him real well.”

**Standards:** RL.7.1

**QUESTION 3:** Why is it useless to attempt to retaliate against the Socs?

Sample Answer: Because of their elevated social class, the Socs are able to recover from any losses they incur. Even if the greasers “whip” them, they will still wake up wealthy and privileged, with the ability to regain anything the greasers take.

**Standards:** RL.7.1

**QUESTION 4:** Ponyboy does not like Dally, but he respects him because he is “smart.” What does Ponyboy mean by “smart,” and how does it differ from Ponyboy’s own intelligence?

Sample Answer: Ponyboy views Dally as an intimidating, experienced individual. Unlike Ponyboy, Dally has been in jail and in gangs. Dally is meaner than the rest of the boys as well, which contributes to his ability to take care of himself. Dally is “street smart,” while Ponyboy is clearly not. Dally would not make the mistake of walking by himself without a knife, as Ponyboy has done.

**Standards:** RL.7.1

**COMPARATIVE TEXTS**

**Text:** *From Hinton to Hamlet* by Sarah K. Herz

**Compare to:** Chapter 1 of *The Outsiders*

**Connection:** In 1967, S.E. Hinton’s breakthrough novel, *The Outsiders*, was published, helping to usher in a new trend in literature for teenagers. Young Adult novels represented a radical change from the predictable world of Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, and other largely white, middle-class characters for teenage readers. By contrast, new YA books respected the ability of teenagers to handle culturally diverse characters and plots involving edgy, real-life topics such as violence, depression, and divorce. Students will read Chapter 1 of *The Outsiders* and write an essay comparing that experience to the impact of YA books described in *From Hinton to Hamlet* and to other books they have read.
CHAPTER 2: Drive-in Confessions

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 2, Paragraph 110

In this passage, Ponyboy recalls Johnny telling him how he was beaten up by four Socs. Even worse than his injuries, Johnny was left terrified by their threats of further violence. He was already anxious from his parents’ constant fighting. Before the Socs’ attack, Johnny was steadier. But afterwards, he was afraid to walk alone and carried a knife with him. In his wound-up state, he was tensed to use it the next time he got jumped.

WHY IT’S KEY

Character: Typically quiet, timid, and deferential to his friends, here we learn that Johnny “had never been a coward” and that he “was a good man in a rumble.” Johnny has already shown a protective side in defending Cherry against Dally, but the fact that Johnny’s also good in a rumble shows bravery and loyalty—two qualities that the reader might not expect. Surprising, too, is the fact that he carries a six-inch switchblade. Although Johnny is shy and jumpy, there is also a side to him that will fight back in order to protect himself and his friends.

Foreshadowing: Ponyboy claims that Johnny would kill the next person who tries to jump him. As the smallest member of the gang, it’s likely Johnny will indeed get jumped again. The next time that happens, this passage foreshadows that the battle may end very differently. Johnny’s six-inch switchblade, though mentioned here only in passing, is likely to be featured prominently later on.

Theme: Violence is a predominant theme in The Outsiders. Whether it’s abuse at home, an attack from a rival gang, or an organized rumble, Ponyboy and his friends have been raised in a violent culture—it’s all they know. Through Johnny, a naturally kind and timid person, we see the devastating effects of this kind of environment. There is no safe space for Johnny. Rather than be beaten or even killed, Johnny is determined to protect himself. In this way, he is a victim of circumstances.

Story Structure: Why does Ponyboy (or S .E. Hinton) save this story until the very end of Chapter 2? Perhaps it’s to underscore the message that there is more to people than meets the eye, another powerful theme in The Outsiders. As readers, we have already made our
judgments about Johnny—he’s weak and needs protecting. Here, we learn that he’s armed and prepared to fight to the death! In this way, the structure of the story supports the theme that there is more complexity to people—Socs, greasers, and hoods—than we immediately may think. Additionally, it ratchets up the suspense for the story to come.

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Discussion Prompt: What can you determine about Johnny’s character based on the story he tells about getting jumped? In what ways was getting jumped by Socs more affecting to Johnny than enduring violence at home? Why do you think Ponyboy says Johnny could “take” getting killed but not getting scared?


VOCABULARY

mill•ing verb
Of a group of people: walking around in a general area with no particular aim or purpose During the intermission most of the audience was milling around outside the theater, chatting and laughing.

heater noun
A handgun (slang) “Drop the heater and come out with your hands up!” the policeman shouted from the alley.

hoodlum noun
A young ruffian; a thug or violent criminal The actor revealed that he had once been a hoodlum and shoplifted his share of candy bars

original adjective
Not like others; new, different, and appealing; happening first Whether you think the inventor is crazy or a genius, you have to admit that she has very original ideas.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: Consider Dally’s relationship with Johnny. How does Dally treat Johnny differently, and why?

Sample Answer: Typically explosive, Dally doesn’t react violently when Johnny tells him not to bother the girls at the drive-in, even though Dally hates being told what to do. He’s also sickened by the sight of Johnny beaten up, even though he’s seen people killed before. Johnny is innocent and well-intentioned, unlike most of Dally’s acquaintances. From this, we can infer that Dally has a soft spot in his heart for Johnny.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 2: In what ways do Two-Bit and Marcia get along? Does their connection come as a surprise? Why or why not?
Sample Answer: Two-Bit and Marcia get along because they share a sense of humor. It’s surprising if you believe that Socs and greasers are inherently different, but one of the major themes in The Outsiders is that people may be more alike than we expect.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 3: Reread the passage in which Ponyboy remembers when Steve’s female cousin from Kansas visited. How did the gang choose to treat her? Why?

Sample Answer: The boys are polite to Steve’s cousin because she’s family, and Ponyboy admits that they are usually only respectful of “cousinly type” girls or girls they see regularly. To strangers or other greaser girls, they are rude and obscene.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 4: Based on what you’ve read so far, what distinguishes Cherry’s character from other girls her age? How is she different from a typical teenage girl in the 1960s?

Sample Answer: Cherry is independent and demands respect. She is determined to make up her own mind about people, rather than accept the popular line. She expresses curiosity about people outside her social group, a characteristic that distinguishes her from other girls her age.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 5: Reread the second-to-last paragraph of Chapter 2. Ponyboy doesn’t know what Socs worry about. What words does he repeat, and what does this repetition say about Ponyboy’s point of view?

Sample Answer: Ponyboy repeats “good” in saying “good grades, good cars, good girls.” The repetition shows that Ponyboy views others in a generalized way. He makes stereotypical judgments of the Socs, just as they do about him.

Standards: RL.7.1
CHAPTERS 3-4: Sunrise to Sunset

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 4, Paragraphs 20–28

This passage narrates the immediate aftermath of Ponyboy’s near-drowning in the park fountain by the Socs, who have fled. Soaked, exhausted, and freezing, Ponyboy looks over at Johnny, who sits beside him, pale and horrified. Johnny says that he killed one of the Socs. Ponyboy then sees the body of Bob, stabbed to death by Johnny, who is still holding his bloody knife. Ponyboy gets sick and feels overwhelmed by the reality of what has happened.

WHY IT’S KEY

Dialogue and Speech: Johnny and, by association, Ponyboy have just committed an extremely serious crime. The gravity of the situation is underscored by how young the characters are, as evidenced in their dialogue. Johnny refers to Bob as “that boy,” which he is, of course, but the word choice indicates a kind of tenderness as well as camaraderie—Johnny is a boy, too. Ponyboy’s use of the word “huh” also makes him sound young, deepening the contrast between the boys’ youth and the seriousness of their crime.

Irony: Johnny promises not to look at Ponyboy while he gets sick, despite the fact that Ponyboy has just partly witnessed Johnny committing murder. The irony comes as we realize that all sense of dignity and privacy has disappeared between the two boys, bound together now by this tragedy. It is further proof of how deeply ingrained the values of this violent culture are in Ponyboy and Johnny, since showing weakness by getting sick is more shameful than killing someone.

Narrative Point of View: This passage marks the transition in narration from past tense to present tense, indicating a turning point in both the book and in Ponyboy’s life. Ponyboy repeats “This can’t be happening” in the present tense, expressing the shock and fear consuming him in that moment. With this sentence, Ponyboy brings the readers into the present moment with him, charging the narrative with a powerful sense of urgency.
Discussion Prompt: Murder is never justified . . . or is it? Do you think Johnny was wrong to kill Bob? If so, what should he have done instead? Consider all that you know about Johnny and the circumstances of his life as you make your judgment.


VOCABULARY

gallantly
gal-lant-ly  adverb
In an unselfish, fearless, and helpful manner
He gallantly led us back to our car in the crowded, confusing parking lot.

unceasingly
un-ceas-ing-ly  adverb
In a manner that never stops, that is continuous
She complains unceasingly about the weather but refuses to move to a different state!

ornery
or-ner-y  adjective
Difficult to control; easily annoyed or irritated
He was an ornery old man who said exactly what he thought, no matter who was there.

contemptuously
con-temp-tu-ous-ly  adverb
In a manner that feels or shows deep hatred or disapproval
As the babysitter scolded her, the little girl smirked contemptuously.

apprehensive
ap-pre-hen-sive  adjective
Afraid that something unpleasant is going to happen
I was apprehensive about letting him climb the ladder to hang the painting, knowing he was afraid of heights.

bewildering
be-wil-der-ing  adjective
Causing confusion due to complexity
How she manages to balance three jobs, play two team sports, and sing in the school musical is bewildering to me.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: Reread Chapter 3, paragraphs 17–18, in which Cherry and Ponyboy talk about sunsets. What is funny about sunsets to Ponyboy? What does this say about Socs and greasers?

Sample Answer: Ponyboy thinks it’s funny that Cherry and he, despite their very different lives, look at the same sunset. No matter how different Socs and greasers might seem, they all live in the same world together and have things in common—like their appreciation of the sunset.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 2: Why does Ponyboy idealize the country while he and Johnny look at the stars in Chapter 4? Do you think he is wrong or right about it?

Sample Answer: Ponyboy thinks the country is where “plain ordinary people” live. He and Johnny dream of a place where are there are no Socs or greasers, just people
who can live without fear. Pony is probably wrong about the country because “things are rough all over,” and clearly his eventual experience in the country is full of fear and drama.

**Standards:** RL.7.1

**QUESTION 3:** What does Johnny notice on Bob’s hand? What does this tell Ponyboy?

Sample Answer: Johnny sees three rings on Bob’s hand. This tells Johnny that Bob was the guy who beat him up. Witnessing this moment, Ponyboy also starts to realize that Bob was the Soc who attacked Johnny.

**Standards:** RL.7.1

**QUESTION 4:** In Chapter 4, how does Johnny say his parents treat him? Why would he prefer to have Darry than his parents?

Sample Answer: Johnny says that his parents just ignore him, no matter where he is or whenever he comes home. He would rather have someone like Darry around to hit him than his own parents, because Darry actually cares where Ponyboy is. Johnny feels like he goes unnoticed and thinks that Darry acts angry out of love rather than indifference.

**Standards:** RL.7.1

**COMPARATIVE TEXTS**

**Text:** Lyndon Johnson’s Inaugural speech

**Compare to:** Chapter 3 of *The Outsiders*

**Connection:** President Johnson took the oath of office twice in two years; first after President Kennedy’s assassination and then again on January 20, 1965, when the American public voted him into office. His inaugural address from 1965 states the challenges, goals, and hopes of America during this pivotal time. The issues that President Johnson raises in his inaugural address resonate with the themes, tensions, and issues present in S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*, which was written that very year.

**Text:** *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare

**Compare to:** Chapter 3 of *The Outsiders*

**Connection:** The story of *Romeo and Juliet* is just as much about the feud between Montagues and Capulets as it is about the two lovers, in the same way that the feud between the Greasers and Socs dominates the relationships in *The Outsiders*. The rival gangs in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Outsiders* are always ready for a fight. As a gang, they are ferocious, but glimpses of the individuals who make up these gangs, from Tybalt to Dallas, show us a glimpse of what is at stake for these boys.
CHAPTER 5: Nothing Gold Can Stay

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 5, Paragraphs 62–67

In this passage, Johnny and Ponyboy have just finished watching the sunrise in silence behind the church where they are hiding out. Johnny admires the golden mist and regrets that it doesn't last. Ponyboy recites a poem he learned by Robert Frost called “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” about impermanence in nature, from flowers to sunrises. Ponyboy is not sure what the poem means, but Johnny tells him the poem expresses exactly what he was saying about wishing the golden light could last.

WHY IT’S KEY

**Theme:** The characters in *The Outsiders* see glimmers of “gold” or beauty in their lives, but these glimmers flicker out just as suddenly. Frost's poem speaks to the relationship between splendor and ephemerality. As children born into a culture of violence—alone in the world without the protection of adults or the security of resources—then joy, innocence, and beauty must indeed seem like fleeting gifts.

**Style:** The language in *The Outsiders* is a unique mix of poetic and urban, as the writer contrasts moments of figurative beauty with intentionally crude dialogue. Johnny's first sentence in the passage uses incorrect grammar, although starting a sentence with “too bad” is common in everyday speech. Similarly, Ponyboy’s dialogue, while natural-sounding to the ear, contains grammatical errors. Stylistically, Hinton aims to show the complexity in Ponyboy and by association all the greasers, as they tackle profound topics using unsophisticated language.

**Character:** Ponyboy and his friends have referred to Ponyboy’s intelligence and academic aptitude, but we haven’t actually seen it until now. Although Darry accuses Ponyboy of not thinking, it's obvious that he is a thinker. He is able to recite a beautiful frost Poem and apply it to his everyday life, drawing connections between life and art without putting much effort into it.

**Sources:** Hinton uses an outside source as an important feature in her novel. “Nothing gold can stay” becomes a repeated theme in the book, aptly describing the circumstances of its characters. Robert Frost's entire body of work and career as a poet, however, is also interesting in context. Robert Frost is in many ways a nature poet, and he discusses
individuality, choice, and self-discovery against the backdrop of nature in its untainted glory. This is the world that Ponyboy longs for: a natural world where the individual can explore and be himself, unbound by society.

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Discussion Prompt: The sunrise that Johnny and Ponyboy watch together is “gold,” but the phrase “nothing gold can stay” refers to more than just the setting. What do you think the “gold” of the poem refers to? What qualities or characters do you think could be considered “gold,” and why? How does that change the meaning of the line?


VOCABULARY

| sullenly | vital |
| sullen•ly adverb | vi•tal adjective |
| In a gloomy or resentfully silent manner | Extremely important; needed for survival |
| The date had gone very poorly, and he walked home sullenly right after dinner ended. | We were desperate to find him because he had vital information that could help us find our missing friend. |

| sentence | sourly |
| sen•tence noun | sour•ly adverb |
| The punishment given by a court of law | Unpleasantly; distastefully |
| The criminal waited nervously to hear his sentence. | She glared at me sourly when I asked her what had gone wrong with her ex-boyfriend. |

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: Chapter 5 is one of the few chapters in which the narrator pays attention to food. What do the boys eat? What does this tell us about the time and place of the story?

Sample Answer: Johnny and Ponyboy eat baloney sandwiches until they run out. Then, when Dally comes, they stop at the Dairy Queen to eat barbeque sandwiches, banana splits, sodas, and hamburgers. These foods are classic examples of mid-century (1960s) American food. Ponyboy’s sudden interest in food could also indicate that he and Johnny are hungry, or at least focused on their survival.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 2: Why do teachers think Johnny is stupid? How does Johnny demonstrate that this isn’t true?

Sample Answer: Teachers think Johnny is stupid because he doesn’t understand things quickly. Johnny’s interest and enjoyment of Gone with the Wind, however, and his responsiveness to the Frost poem show his intelligence. As Ponyboy says, Johnny likes
to spend time with things once he comes to understand them. Johnny actually enjoys learning.
Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 3: What does Ponyboy think a few times after reading Sodapop’s letter? What does this imply about the nature of their relationship?
Sample Answer: Ponyboy thinks that Sodapop could improve his spelling, particularly his spelling of “selves” as “selfves.” Even though Soda is the older brother and Ponyboy looks up to him, Soda is uneducated, and in some ways Pony is more mature.
Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 4: Who does Dally claim is the “spy” for the greasers?
Sample Answer: Cherry Valance
Standards: RL.7.1
CHAPTER 6: Fire!

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 6, Paragraphs 73–78

In this passage, Ponyboy is riding in an ambulance, being taken to the hospital. It is just after he, Johnny, and Dally entered the burning church to rescue the children who had gone inside. Jerry, one of the adults in charge of the children, is telling Ponyboy that Dally came out all right, but that Johnny was badly burned by a falling beam. He goes on to praise the three boys for their heroics. Ponyboy rejects his “heaven-sent” characterization, explaining that the three of them are greasers with police records and bad reputations.

WHY IT’S KEY

Plot: Even though Johnny had just announced that he planned on turning himself in, this event accelerates that plan and makes it a reality. By going to the hospital, they all have blown their cover. This incident, however, also puts the boys in a better light: as heroes, they may make a better impression in court. In this passage, we see the way Mrs. O’Briant and Jerry see the boys, and the contrast between their bravery and their criminal past.

Character: Ponyboy is very rarely this direct with people. The fact that he so eagerly announces that they are wanted for murder reveals that the murder has toughened him up. He is eager to show people how wrong they can be about his friends and him.

Theme: The theme that people are deeper and more complex than they appear is especially strong here, because for once we have an outsider’s perspective on the boys that isn’t of hatred, pity, or contempt rather admiration and respect. While the Socs have called the boys “white trash” and other derogatory names, Jerry sees them as “angels” and “heroes.” Johnny is a murderer, yet he has also just demonstrated a heroic degree of bravery and kindness. Even Dally, who Ponyboy assumed could never love anyone, put his own life in danger to save Johnny. Expectations are being defied everywhere in this passage, and Ponyboy will soon internalize this lesson and learn to see people on a deeper level.
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Discussion Prompt: Based on this section, what can you determine about the way Ponyboy is changing? Analyze the potential reasons for these changes. Do you think these changes are good or bad? Why?

VOCABULARY

**breed**
**breed noun**
A number of persons from the same stock, class, or kind
You could tell we were a working breed by our calloused hands.

**conviction**
**con-vice-tion noun**
A strong belief or opinion
It was her conviction that avoiding meat was the best way to help animals.

**testify**
**tes-ti-fy verb**
To make a statement of the facts after swearing to their truth; to give proof of something
She agreed to testify to everything she saw and heard on the night of the party.

**survey**
**sur-vey verb**
To view or consider comprehensively; to examine
He surveyed the rocky terrain, looking for a secure foothold.

**embers**
**em-bers noun**
Pieces of glowing coal or wood from a fire
He warned the children not to stay too close to the campfire, fearing they might be burned by the stray embers.

CLOSE READ

**QUESTION 1:** Why does Dallas think Cherry refused to get a Coke with him? Does Ponyboy agree with his reasoning?
Sample Answer: Dallas claims that Cherry hates him, but Ponyboy remembers Cherry saying she’s afraid of falling in love with Dally. Ponyboy believes she’s staying away from Dally out of fear.
Standards: RL.7.1

**QUESTION 2:** When does Johnny look like he’s having the “time of his life”? Why do you think he is so happy?
Sample Answer: Johnny looks like he’s having the time of his life when they are in the burning church, saving children. Although it’s surprising, Johnny probably feels happy doing this because it is an opportunity to be brave, for good. He is saving people rather than hurting them.
Standards: RL.7.1
QUESTION 3: When Ponyboy wakes up in the ambulance, what does he think the siren noises mean? Why do you think he makes this assumption?

Sample Answer: Ponyboy thinks the siren sounds are the police coming to arrest him, but really it’s an ambulance saving him. His assumption highlights his experience as a greaser: society is usually telling him he’s doing something wrong, not helping him out.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 4: What does Ponyboy realize about Darry when he sees him crying? How does this revelation connect to some of the greater themes in the book?

Sample Answer: Ponyboy realizes that Darry really loves him, and the only reason he yells at him is because he is afraid of losing him. Ponyboy has made judgments about Darry based on simple, superficial things, rather than understanding him as a whole. Just as society has superficial categories about greasers and Socs and criminals and heroes, Ponyboy has been judging Darry unfairly.

Standards: RL.7.1
CHAPTERS 7–9: A Rumble and a Death

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 7, Paragraphs 108–111

This passage is part of a conversation between Ponyboy and Randy, one of the Socs who attacked him the night he nearly drowned. Randy has called Ponyboy over to his car after the Socs meet Ponyboy and Two-Bit at the Tasty Freeze. A rumble has been planned between the two groups that night. Randy confides in Ponyboy that he’s not going to the rumble, that its outcome is meaningless. Even if the Socs lose, they will still be favored by society and the greasers will still be rejected. He feels stuck and wants to leave town. Ponyboy realizes what Cherry meant when she said that everyone has it rough, Socs and greasers alike.

WHY IT’S KEY

**Theme:** Everyone who lives in a society marked by violence and stereotypes is trapped. So far, we have seen the ways the greasers are victims of this kind of culture, but here, Ponyboy has his first pang of recognizing the struggle in a Soc. In this passage, Randy explains his own dilemma: if he fights, his conscience will all but kill him, but if he doesn’t fight, his friends will think him a coward. By planning to run away, Randy proves that the system has failed him. He feels his only choice is to leave.

**Character:** When Cherry told Ponyboy that “things are rough all over,” he didn’t believe her. Now Randy, a Soc, has just articulated a lot of the same fears and frustrations that Ponyboy experiences. In fact, Randy’s statement of the “ones in the middle” being the “lucky stiffs” parallels Ponyboy’s yearning for the country, where people are just plain, simple people without the label of Soc or greaser. We don’t know enough about Randy as a character to say whether he’s grown or changed. What we do know is that Randy is a Soc and he’s got problems—and to Ponyboy, this is a real revelation!

**Style:** Hinton makes use of repetition in Randy’s monologue, most specifically the repetition of “it doesn’t do any good” as well as the repetition in the phrase “Greasers will still be greasers, and Socs will still be Socs.” By repeating these words, Hinton hammers home the fact that the fighting is futile and the theme that these societal feuds are an inescapable cycle: if they don’t break the societal chains, the fighting and killing are born to repeat itself, over and over.
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Discussion Prompt: Why do you think Randy confides in Ponyboy? How does Randy’s confiding help Ponyboy understand what Cherry meant by “Things are rough all over”? Discuss the value of that understanding in The Outsiders and in your own experience, citing examples.


VOCABULARY

charity
char•i•ty noun
Generosity and helpfulness toward the needy and poor
He was a hard-working and prideful man who refused to accept charity even when he had little money.

spruce
spruce adjective
Neat or clean in appearance; cleaned up to be made more attractive
She had just gone on a shopping trip and looked very spruce in the new red dress.

affectionately
af•fec•tion•ate•ly adverb
In a manner showing or feeling love or warmth
She tousled her little brother's hair affectionately.

prime
prime adjective
Of the best quality or value
The bench by the lake was a prime spot for our picnic.

hoarse
hoarse adjective
Rough or harsh in sound
Her voice was hoarse from screaming.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: Why could Darry have been a Soc if not for the gang?
Sample Answer: Darry is handsome and was a football star. Ponyboy often mentions how he doesn’t look like most of the lean, grimy greasers. He looks like a Soc and was talented enough that they would have accepted him. His loyalty to his brothers held him back.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 2: What does Johnny mean when he says “stay gold” right before he dies?
Sample Answer: Johnny is referencing the Robert Frost poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay” that the two boys discussed while in hiding. Mirroring the themes in the poem, Johnny means to tell Ponyboy to stay young, beautiful, and innocent. He means to tell Ponyboy not to succumb to the meanness and hardness of life as a greaser.

Standards: RL.7.1
QUESTION 3: Why do you think Dally is “raving” toward the end of Chapter 9? Why is Ponyboy so confused by his conduct?

Sample Answer: Dally is acting strangely out of love. Dally doesn’t know how to handle the love he has for Johnny and the grief he feels over his dying state, so he “raves” on in an angry manner. Ponyboy had previously assumed that Dally couldn’t love anything.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 4: What does Two-Bit think is wrong with the headline “Juvenile Delinquents Turn Heroes”? How would you rewrite the headline to reflect the themes of *The Outsiders*?

Sample Answer: Two-Bit doesn’t like the word “turn” because he thinks they were heroes from the beginning. They didn’t change; they always had heroism in them. Rewriting the headline as “Juvenile Delinquents and Heroes” would fit the theme of the novel better.

Standards: RL.7.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Paterson  
**Compare to:** Chapters 7–8 in *The Outsiders*  
**Connection:** Katherine Paterson’s novel tells the story of Jess and Leslie, two unlikely friends who come together to create an imaginary kingdom in the woods near their homes. Like Cherry and Ponyboy, they form an unlikely friendship based on connection, rather than common ground. (Note: see additional Lesson Plan for this text in the StudySync library.)

Text: “Rest in Peace, Doc”  
**Compare to:** Chapter 9 of *The Outsiders*  
**Connection:** “Rest in Peace, Doc” is a real-life account, told by a greaser and commemorating a fallen gang member. This testimonial echoes the pain and loss in S. E. Hinton’s *The Outsiders*. 
CHAPTERS 10–11: Dally Gets What He Wants

KEY PASSAGE | Chapter 10, Paragraphs 33–34

This passage describes Dally’s last moments as witnessed by Ponyboy. Distraught after Johnny’s death, Dally has run off to do something desperate. He has robbed a grocery store and called Darry for help, but the police have surrounded him in the vacant lot while the greasers watch at a distance. Dally pulls out a gun that isn’t loaded, but is sure to draw the policemen’s fire. They kill him. Ponyboy knows it was an act of suicide. He reflects on both the bad and good in Dally and concludes Dally died recklessly but bravely.

WHY IT’S KEY

Point of View: Ponyboy’s point of view about Dally has changed dramatically since the beginning of the novel. Previously, although Ponyboy didn’t like Dally, he wouldn’t have used the words “blasted fool” to describe him. Frightening, reckless, angry, or admirable would have perhaps entered his mind, but not foolish. Although he himself has not recognize it yet, Ponyboy has developed a new confidence and a new disdain for a recklessly violent lifestyle.

Tone: “Two friends of mine had died that night: one a hero, the other a hoodlum.” This line has a sarcastic tone. We know that Ponyboy now sees both boys as heroes and hoodlums (the two are not mutually exclusive.) By referring to Johnny and Dally as “hero” and “hoodlum,” Ponyboy purposefully mimics society’s superficial and simplistic views. Ponyboy’s tone is sad, sarcastic, exasperated, and somewhat defiant, as evidenced by the final two short, assured sentences: “But Johnny was right. He died gallant.”

Theme: In The Outsiders, society is a cage with no easy way out. Even though the greasers view themselves as being outside the cage, they are in fact equally trapped. Ultimately, Ponyboy will discover that his storytelling ability is the key that will unlock his cage door. But what if you don’t have special talents and you still want to find a way out? Randy splits town. Dally finds another way to leave.
Discussion Prompt: What does Ponyboy mean when he says Dally died “gallant”? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?  

VOCABULARY

bluff
bluff noun  
An act of deception by pretending to do or have something  
*Her claim to be a reporter was just a bluff so she could ask the prince for his help.*

liable
liable adjective  
Likely to do or be affected by something; legally responsible for something  
*He was so clumsy, he was liable to trip simply getting out of bed.*

indignantly
indignantly adverb  
In a manner that shows anger because of something unjust or unfair  
*She gasped indignantly when her teacher accused her of cheating.*

idolized
idolized verb  
Loved or admired someone very much or too much; worshipped someone  
*The fans idolized the slugger for his home runs and his generosity.*

guardian
guardian noun  
Someone who is legally required to take care of another person or another person’s property  
The girl’s aunt was also her legal guardian, since her mother was always traveling.

CLOSE READ

QUESTION 1: Why does Dally ultimately decide to rob the grocery store?  
Sample Answer: Dally wants to die after he sees Johnny die. He knows that if he robs a grocery store and bluffs having a gun, the police will see him as a violent hoodlum and kill him.  
Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 2: Whose picture does Ponyboy see while going through Sodapop’s old yearbook? Why doesn’t he recognize the person immediately?  
Sample Answer: Ponyboy sees Robert Sheldon (Bob) in Sodapop’s old yearbook. He doesn’t recognize the photo because Bob is two years younger—a sophomore—in it, but also because Ponyboy just saw him as a drunken, menacing Soc, rather than as a young boy.  
Standards: RL.7.1
QUESTION 3: Who does Ponyboy say killed Bob? Why?
Sample Answer: Ponyboy tells Randy that he, Ponyboy, killed Bob. He denies that Johnny killed him. This is part of his denial that Johnny (and Dally) have died—he also denies that Johnny was mixed up in the entire ordeal that led to his death.
Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 4: What effect could the upcoming trial have on the Curtis family? Why do you think it is so important for the boys to stay together?
Sample Answer: The judge at the trial might decide that Ponyboy’s involvement with the manslaughter case proves that Darry is an unfit guardian. This would mean Sodapop and Ponyboy would be sent off to a home, rather than live with their brother. It’s important for them to stay together because they love each other, but it’s also all they have of family, and part of their identity, since they don’t have much else.
Standards: RL.7.1
CHAPTER 12: Paul Newman and a Ride Home

KEY PASSAGE  | Chapter 12, Paragraphs 66–72

This passage occurs just after Ponyboy has read a final note from Johnny stuck in the pages of Gone with the Wind. Johnny, knowing he is dying, urges Ponyboy to believe in the good in the world and in himself and to tell Dally for him. Knowing it’s too late for Dally, Ponyboy reflects on how important that positive message is for all those who need to hear it, both the greasers and those who judge them by their appearance. He resolves to tell his own story in the theme he owes his English teacher—about the Socs and greasers, Johnny, Dally, all of it. He begins to write the text of The Outsiders.

WHY IT’S KEY

Narrative Point of View: So, is this Ponyboy’s theme? Is The Outsiders not only Ponyboy’s personal narrative but also a trio of personal narrative, school assignment, and attempt to change society by sharing the greasers’ story with the world? Although The Outsiders is a work of fiction, this passage establishes Ponyboy’s intent: to show the real, feeling human beings behind the long hair. This passage marks Ponyboy’s attempt to break the cycle of violence and hatred.

Theme: In the words of Cherry Valance, one of the main themes of The Outsiders is “it’s not personal.” It’s not personal when Socs beat greasers, or when greasers rob grocery stores, or when people assume the worst about Ponyboy and his friends, or when the gang assumes the Socs are all happy just because they’re rich. In this passage, Ponyboy realizes that as long as people continue to judge each other on their appearance, the world is never going to change. “It’s not personal” . . . but it should be. Ponyboy, the greasers, and the Socs have all been the victims of this vast, impersonal problem . . . but he hopes to make it personal.

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Discussion Prompt: Ponyboy ends the novel with the same sentence that starts it. Why? Now that you have finished the entire book, what meaning do you see in this phrase? How has its significance changed from what it meant on page 1? How does it impact your feelings about The Outsiders?

Standards: RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.4; SL.7.1A, SL.7.1C, SL.7.1D
**VOCABULARY**

**acquitted**
ac-quit-ted verb
Freed from an accusation; decided someone was not guilty of a crime.
He cried for joy after the judge acquitted him due to a lack of evidence.

**puzzled**
puzz-led adjective
Confused; having difficulty understanding something or someone
Although her friends left her clues to where her birthday presents were, she frowned and looked puzzled.

**relieved**
re-lieved adjective
Feeling relaxed or happy because something difficult or unpleasant has been stopped or avoided
She was relieved when her friend cancelled their movie plans, since she was in a terrible mood.

**vast**
vast adjective
Very great in size, amount, or extent
She looked out onto the vast, starry sky and wondered if life could exist on other planets.

**veered**
veered verb
Changed direction or course
He suddenly veered off the road to avoid hitting the deer.

**CLOSE READ**

**QUESTION 1:** Why does Sodapop run out of the house? What does Ponyboy realize he and Darry have been doing to Sodapop, and how does this relate to any of the book’s themes?
Sample Answer: Sodapop runs out of the house because Darry and Ponyboy are fighting again, and he is in the middle of it. Ponyboy realizes Darry and he have been ignoring Sodapop’s feelings, assuming he’s always happy and carefree because of the front he puts on. This relates to the quickly formed, and incorrect, judgments made about all members of society, based solely on their “front” or social class.
Standards: RL.7.1

**QUESTION 2:** Who is the “doctor” that speaks to the judge before the hearing? What does our knowledge about him say about Ponyboy and the hearing?
Sample Answer: The doctor is really the psychologist evaluating Ponyboy. His presence further solidifies our knowledge that Ponyboy is in a state of psychological distress and denial when it comes to Johnny’s crime and death. It also signals to the reader that some of the hearing is to determine whether Ponyboy is psychologically sound enough to live with Darry.
Standards: RL.7.1

**QUESTION 3:** What bothers Two-Bit about Ponyboy busting a bottle when the Socs threaten him, and what makes him feel better? How does this relate to the Frost poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay”?

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Sample Answer: When Two-Bit sees Ponyboy bust the bottle, he is afraid that Ponyboy is getting “tough” just like the other greasers. But when he sees Ponyboy picking up the broken glass, Two-Bit is reassured that Ponyboy is still a good person. In other words, Two-Bit wants Ponyboy to “stay gold” too. He wants him to retain his innocence and natural goodness.

Standards: RL.7.1

QUESTION 4: What does Darry mean by telling Ponyboy he’s living in a “vacuum”? How do you think Ponyboy eventually gets out of it?

Sample Answer: Darry means that Ponyboy is isolated from reality. He’s ignoring school, his friends, and the hard facts of life that Johnny and Dally are dead. Ponyboy is not accepting the world around him. Ponyboy eventually gets out of his own personal vacuum by writing the theme and thus coming to terms with what happened.

Standards: RL.7.1

COMPARATIVE TEXTS

Text: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Compare to: Chapter 12 of The Outsiders

Connection: Learning to read was Frederick Douglass’s first taste of freedom. For Susan Eloise Hinton, storytelling was her safe place, her outlet, her way out. (Note: see additional Lesson Plan for this text in the StudySync library.) S. E. Hinton was only 15 when she wrote “The Outsiders,” and it was published upon her graduation from high school. Famously private, in a New York Times interview in 2005 she revealed surprising and disturbing facts about her childhood. She joins Frederick Douglass and countless other American adolescents who used storytelling to triumph over abuse.
WRITE TO REVISIT

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING

Prompt: What is the significance of cars in American society in the 1960s? After watching this commercial for a Ford Mustang from 1965, develop an argument for the role that cars played on American society in the 1960s and in S. E. Hinton’s The Outsiders. Conduct your own research project, gathering three additional sources, both print and digital, to support your claim. Assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, quote, or paraphrase, following a standard format for citation. In addition to your initial claim, generate two additional related questions that deepen your argument. Write about 500 words.


NARRATIVE WRITING

Prompt: In the novel Bronx Masquerade, the students in Mr. Ward’s English class aren’t accustomed to having their voices heard. Mr. Ward offers them the freedom to tell their story, in their own words, much like Ponyboy does in The Outsiders. Like Ponyboy, Tyrone, Devon and Janelle walk the outskirts of society. Through sharing their stories, the bridges that connect us grow stronger. Tell a story of social dynamics—people growing or changing—that you have witnessed firsthand. You can tell the story in memoir form, as in Bronx Masquerade, or by using another kind of media. For inspiration, check out this video featuring S. E. Hinton, in which she describes not only the locations that inspired The Outsiders but the process of turning those locations into significant story points.
