

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Outsiders

by S. E. Hinton

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Chapter 1

1. Ponyboy likes to go to the movies alone because he can really get into the movie when there aren't other people talking and fooling around. Have you ever felt angry when people talk during a movie? What did you do?
2. Do you know anyone like Ponyboy, who is different from the other people in a group because he or she likes to read? Does he or she down-play any interest in reading when with the group?
3. Ponyboy says Dallas grew up too fast, Sodapop never grew up at all, and he doesn't know which is best. What's your opinion?
4. Ponyboy states, "I could have gotten one of the gang to come along, one of the four boys that Dallas, Soda, and I have grown up with and consider family." In your journal explain to a classmate how having close friends can feel like "family" and relate it to your own experience.
5. When Ponyboy speaks about his tight-knit neighborhood, it reminds me of a comment the rapper, Ice Cube, made about the South Central L.A. neighborhood where he grew up. He said that movies depict living there as a grim existence, but there were a lot of good times in the neighborhood. How would you rate your neighborhood in this regard?
6. Ponyboy says, "If it hadn't been for the gang, Johnny would never have known what love and affection are." Although you hear it said a great deal, I find it difficult to believe that a gang provides a person what he or she might not get at home. What's your opinion?

Response Journal

7. It's clear why the greasers resent the Socs, but as Ponyboy asks, "Why did *they hate us* so much? We left them alone." Write the dialogue that takes place between Ponyboy and a Soc when Ponyboy asks that question.

Ponyboy: Why do the Socs hate us?

Soc:

8. " 'Hhhmmm.' He sighed happily, 'it's real nice.' " This is the way Soda describes being in love with Sandy. Consider a time in your life when you felt you were in love; how did it make you feel?

Chapter 2

9. Assume you have just met Ponyboy. Write a letter to your cousin describing him. Include what you like about him, what you don't like about him, and why you would or would not want him to be your friend.
10. Ponyboy describes Marcia and Cherry as not being "our kind." Describe an incident from your life in which someone considered you as not being "our kind." How did it make you feel? What, if anything, did you do to change that situation?
11. Cherry tells Ponyboy that the "West Side Socs" have "troubles you've never even heard of." Describe the possible Soc problems that Cherry is referring to and contrast/compare them to a greaser's problems. Do you think one group has it worse than the other?
12. At the end of chapter two, Ponyboy dismisses the Socs' problems as being confined to, "good grades, good cars, good girls, madras, and Mustangs and Corvairs." Assume you are a Soc; write a letter to Ponyboy explaining why he is wrong. Do some research and explain what "madras" and "Corvair" relate to.

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13. Ponyboy seems to be prejudiced against greaser girls; he seems to see mostly negative things about them and positive things about Soc girls. Assume you are a greaser girl who looks the way Ponyboy describes. Write a letter trying to get him to understand greaser girls and why they look and act as they do.

14. The book presents stereotypical pictures of “greasers” and “Socs.” Describe the picture presented of each group and, if you can, point out why these portrayals are stereotypes.

Chapter 3

15. Cherry says that the Socs always try to be cool and act like nothing makes a difference to them. Maybe you know someone like that. Why do you suppose people would want to act like that?

16. Ponyboy says it's not just money that separates the Socs from the greasers; “it's feelings—the Socs don't feel anything and the greasers feel too violently.” If you agree with this, give examples; if you don't agree with it, tell why you disagree.

17. Cherry says that she and her middle-class friends are caught up in a rat race of wanting possessions and never being satisfied with them when they get them. What do you find right or wrong about that statement?

18. Because Ponyboy feels he made a fool of himself in front of everyone with his outburst, he turns on someone weaker than himself, Johnny, and lashes out at him. Relate a time when you saw someone lash out at someone else who was weak simply because the first person was feeling foolish or threatened.

Response Journal

19. Speaking of the financial inequity in life, Ponyboy says, "It ain't fair." Two-Bit says, "That's the way things are, like it or lump it." I suspect that life won't always be that way for Ponyboy, but it will be for Two-Bit. What do you think?
20. Although it is popular to say that opposites attract, many people do not find it believable that Cherry could be attracted to Dallas. What do you think?
21. In chapter three, we learn that Ponyboy feels he and Dallas do not get along. Assume you are Ponyboy and write a letter to Dallas explaining what you think is wrong with your relationship and provide possible solutions.
22. As Ponyboy, respond in a dialogue to Cherry after she says:
- Cherry: "I mean... if I see you in the hall at school or someplace and don't say hi, well, it's not personal or anything, but..."
- Ponyboy:
23. Ponyboy runs out of the house after Dallas hits him. Do you have an older brother or sister who is tough on you? If not, do you know someone that does? What kind of relationship exists between the siblings?
24. Johnny says, "It seems like there's gotta be someplace without greasers or Socs, with just plain people." Describe what this place would look like.

Chapter 4

25. Referring to Dallas, Ponyboy states, "It would be a miracle if Dallas could love anything. The fight for self-preservation had hardened him beyond caring." Do you think a person could really be too hardened to love?
26. Discuss how Johnny reacted the night he and Ponyboy were attacked by the Socs. Would you have handled the situation differently? If so, how?

Chapter 5

27. Early in chapter five, why is Ponyboy reluctant to have his hair cut? Why it is so important to him? Is there anything in your appearance about which you feel that strongly?
28. Ponyboy recites Robert Frost's poem, *Nothing Gold Can Stay*. If you understand this poem and you can you relate it to the story, explain it to a classmate who is having trouble seeing the meaning and relationship.
29. Johnny thinks that Dallas is gallant because when he was arrested for something Two-Bit had done, Dallas just took the sentence without mentioning anything he knew. Some people would say Dallas was stupid for going to jail for something Two-Bit had done. What's your opinion?

Chapter 6

30. When she is acting as a spy for the greasers, do you think Cherry is doing the right thing? Is it something you would do under the same circumstances?
31. Johnny considers turning himself in to the police. If you had been there and he asked for your opinion, what would you say?

Johnny: “What should I do?”

You:

Chapter 7

32. Randy tells Ponyboy, “You can’t win, even if you whip us, you’ll still be where you were before—at the bottom. And we’ll still be the lucky ones with all the breaks.” Assuming that Randy is correct, why is the rumble so important to the greasers?
33. What is Randy’s dilemma about the rumble that night? What would you say to Randy if he asked you for advice?
34. As a newspaper reporter, write an article about Johnny and Ponyboy saving the children from the burning church.
35. Randy’s friend Bob was kind of wild, and Randy seems to be blaming Bob’s parents because they never set limits on Bob. According to Randy, that’s what Bob wanted. With how much of what Randy said can you agree?

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36. Imagine you're an advice columnist from a newspaper, and you get a letter from Sodapop explaining the problem he and Sandy are having. What advice would you give him?
37. An epiphany is defined as the moment when a character in a novel gets a sudden insight into life and living. What is the epiphany that Ponyboy gets at the end of this chapter, and how does he come to that conclusion?
38. If at this point in your reading, you had an opportunity to talk to the writer of this novel, what would you say about the novel, or what questions would you ask?
39. As a newspaper editor of a Tulsa paper, write an editorial about last night's killing in the park of a young man by another young man.
40. A producer for a TV talk show reads the editorial that you write and invites the Socs and greasers to send representatives to the show to talk about the problem. Write a scenario which identifies the interviewer, the kind of questions he or she asks, which of the Socs and greasers are present, and the dialogue on stage.

Chapter 8

41. While in the hospital, Johnny refuses a visit from his mother. Assume you are Johnny's mother, and write a letter to Johnny telling him how you feel about his refusal to see you. As Johnny, write a letter back to your mother telling her why.
 42. Dallas says, "We gotta get even with the Socs, for Johnny." Is this something you would do for your friend? If you disagree with Dallas' thinking on this point, tell him why you think he is wrong.
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Response Journal

43. Two-Bit states, “The only thing that keeps Dally from bein’ a Soc is us.” What is there about Dallas that leads Two-Bit to make that statement?
44. What do you suppose the talk about sunsets means at the end of this chapter? How do you feel about sunsets?
45. If it follows that we like people when we get to know them better, does it mean all people have a good side to them once we get to know them? If that’s true, would we like almost anyone once we got to know him or her?

Chapter 9

46. Ponyboy asks what kind of a world is it where you’re proud of being a hood with greasy hair. This question shows he recognizes that these are dumb things to be proud of. You probably know people who are proud of foolish things. Why do you suppose people are like that?
47. About fighting, Ponyboy says: Soda fought for fun; Steve for hatred; Dallas for pride; Two-Bit to conform. Ponyboy concludes, “There isn’t any real good reason for fighting except self-defense.” What’s your opinion on this?
48. After looking at the hoods, who would just become older hoods, Ponyboy says of Dallas, “He was going to get somewhere.” He adds that neither he nor Dallas will live in a lousy neighborhood all their lives. He makes it sound as if getting ahead is simply a matter of determination. How true do you think that is?

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49. Ponyboy speaks of the Socs and the greasers as hating each other, but, the word “hate” is somewhat of an exaggeration. How would you describe the social-class differences in your community?
50. Johnny makes a reference to the Robert Frost poem *Nothing Gold Can Stay* when he says, “Stay gold Ponyboy...stay gold.” If you understand what Johnny is telling Ponyboy, explain it to a classmate who doesn’t get it.

Chapter 10

51. What was your opinion of Dallas’ actions in this chapter? Some people think it was quite dramatic, while others criticized it. How did you feel about it?
52. Throughout the story, the greasers are portrayed as decent kids, who occasionally get into trouble, while the Socs are bad kids who always get into trouble. Is this a fair representation of the two groups? Do you think the author’s sympathies lie with one group?
53. Consider the author’s point of view and discuss whether you think the author grew up a greaser or a Soc. Provide examples which support your point.
54. *The Outsiders* deals with the trials and tribulations of growing up. Consider where you are in your life and discuss whether or not you feel this book accurately portrays adolescents. How are their problems the same as the one you and your friends have; how are they different?

Chapters 11 and 12

55. Early in chapter twelve, Soda runs out of the house because Dallas and Ponyboy are arguing. Later, Soda tells the two that he feels he gets caught in the middle and that their arguments are tearing the family apart. Has there been an incident in which you may have been caught in the middle and were forced to choose sides? How did you deal with it?

Wrap Up

56. The gang fight in the park and the earlier stabbing death, particularly since it took place in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and not Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York City, might attract the attention of a news magazine show like *60 Minutes*. Choose a show of this type and write a scenario. Include the name of the interviewer, the person he or she interviews, the scenes and locations televised, and the opening and closing editorial comments of the interviewer.
57. What did you think was done well or not so well in this novel?
58. If you were in a one-on-one conversation with the author, what would you say?
59. When you read the short biography of the author at the end of the novel, were you surprised by anything?
60. When you read the last page of this novel, what were your thoughts and/or feelings?

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61. Many novels that have young people as the main characters are in the Coming of Age genre. The term indicates that in the course of the novel, the character moves from immaturity to maturity. In what ways do you think *The Outsiders* would fit this description?

62. Sometimes when a novel ends, we are sorry because we wish to spend more time with the characters who we've come to know well. In a sequel to this novel, tell what you think happens to Ponyboy, Sodapop, and Dallas in the next ten years of their lives.