

# The Outsiders



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF S. E. HINTON

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 During Hinton's teenage years, she wrote two books that were unpublished before she wrote *The Outsiders*, which was published when she was 19 years old.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.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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.

### 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.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Outsiders*
- **When Written:** 1964-5

- **Where Written:** Tulsa, Oklahoma
- **When Published:** 1967
- **Literary Period:** Modern American
- **Genre:** Young adult fiction
- **Setting:** Tulsa, Oklahoma
- **Climax:** The deaths of Johnny and Dally
- **Point of View:** First person

### 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 a 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 hospital, 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

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

**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.

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

### MINOR CHARACTERS

**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.

**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.

**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 Merrill** – 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.

**Jerry Wood** – A bystander who saw what happened when Ponyboy and Johnny ran into the burning church.

black and white.



## 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.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in



## 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. 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.



## 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.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the 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 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.



## GREASER HAIR

The greasers' 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.



## 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.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Speak edition of *The Outsiders* published in 2006.

### 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 1

#### Explanation and Analysis

Here we meet Ponyboy Curtis, the narrator and protagonist of *The Outsiders*. Ponyboy is a member of the Greasers; a gang of teenage boys in the poor neighborhood of a suburban town. In this opening scene, Ponyboy has spent an afternoon at the movies—one of his favorite activities—and has a long walk home. He prefers to go to the movies alone, but also fears that he may be jumped by the Greasers' rivals, the Socs, on his way home. After the movie gets out he instantly regrets not asking one of his brothers or friends to come with him.

Author S.E. Hinton introduces her audience to the rough and tumble world of *The Outsiders* from this very first line. After the death of their parents, Ponyboy and his brothers, Darry and Sodapop, live alone together. Ponyboy's world is filled with violence and conflict. The Greasers live with a constant hatred for and fear of the Socs. However Ponyboy's personality doesn't seem to reflect that of the average "gang member." He is sensitive and introspective; he loves film and avoids trouble. Yet he was born into this divided community, and so he finds himself inextricably involved in it.

☞ 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 4

#### Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Ponyboy outlines the class divide between rival gangs, the Greasers and the Socs.

"Soc" stands for "the Socials." The group is made up of wealthy kids that have grown up on the West side of town. The name "Greaser" is a reference to the greasy hair of the poorer kids on the East side of town. Ponyboy and his gang live in hatred and fear of the Socs, who constantly attempt to fight them.

Although Ponyboy is only 14, his sense of class divide is very clear. They are rich; he is poor. They are the haves; he is the have-not. Their affluence makes them a threat.

☞ 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Darry Curtis, Sodapop Curtis

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 18

#### Explanation and Analysis

As Ponyboy and his brother Sodapop lay in the bed they share, Soda tells him that he plans on moving out and marrying his girlfriend. Ponyboy asks Soda to stay until he gets out of school so he doesn't have to be left alone with Darry. Soda then explains to Ponyboy that Darry does love him. Darry is only hard on him because he sees Ponyboy's potential; he is considered the smart one in the family, and so he has a future apart from being a Greaser. Darry is simply trying to push Ponyboy to work hard in order to have



the life that he was never able to.


During this quote as narrator, Ponyboy acknowledges to the readers that he's lying to himself about Darry's sternness and tough love. He knows how hard it is for Darry to parent his two younger brothers. Darry's hardness and sense of dislike for Ponyboy is one of the many lies Ponyboy tells himself throughout the book to avoid facing the truth.

## 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Johnny Cade

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 34

### Explanation and Analysis


Before this scene, Ponyboy, Dally, and Johnny are introduced to Cherry and her friend Marcia at a local drive in. Ponyboy takes Cherry to get concessions and she asks him why Johnny is so quiet and skittish. Ponyboy explains that a few months back, Johnny was jumped by four Socs. They snuck up on him in a blue Mustang. One, who we will later learn is Bob, was wearing rings on his fingers, and left a long scar across Johnny's face. Since that moment, the sweet, nonviolent Johnny never goes anywhere alone and carries a switchblade for protection.

Here, Hinton highlights how dangerous the divide between the Greasers and the Socs truly is. This moment is also another instance of juxtaposing innocence and violence. Johnny and Ponyboy are young, introspective, and non-violent youths living in a world where they are forced to face and react with violence.

The blade and the Blue Mustang become important symbols of the divided communities of the Socs and Greasers. For Johnny, there's no turning back, and if given the opportunity to use the blade on a Soc and kill him, he would.

●● "Things are rough all over."

**Related Characters:** Cherry Valance (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 35

### Explanation and Analysis

This one line reveals Cherry as a connector between the Socs and Greasers. After Ponyboy tells her the story of Johnny's brutal attack, she argues that not all Socs are like that. They may have nicer homes and fancier clothes, but money can't solve everything. Cherry humanizes the Socs for Ponyboy for the first time, and this moment begins a friendship between the two that will continue to develop.


Cherry and Ponyboy are very similar characters. They are both sensitive people living in a rough and dangerous space, and both feel trapped by their surroundings and their personal ties to their own communities. Here we see a moment of empathy between Ponyboy and Cherry. By opening up to Ponyboy, Cherry helps him understand that regardless of class, gang allegiance, or anything at all, the Socs and the Greasers are all *people*. She will continue to encourage Ponyboy to be empathetic toward others throughout the book.

## 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Cherry Valance

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 40-41

### Explanation and Analysis


As Ponyboy and Two-Bit drive Cherry and Marcia home, Ponyboy sees that these women (Socs) aren't very different from him. They like the same music, they do the same things. Ponyboy resolves that maybe money is the only difference between the Greasers and the Socs. Cherry disagrees; She tells him that their differences lie in something deeper: feelings. She explains that the Socs are forced to wear a mask of sophistication and aloofness, hiding who they really


are. The Greasers, on the other hand, are open with their emotions. They are honest and don't feel the need to perform.

As they walk, Cherry asks Ponyboy if he likes watching the sunset at night. They realize that they share this love. The ever introspective and sensitive Ponyboy then realizes that while they may be on opposite sides of town, on different porches, in different gangs, they all watch the same sunset. In this moment, Cherry encourages Ponyboy once again to see his rivals as humans and to exercise empathy. Cherry is a window through which Ponyboy can understand the Socs. In addition, the sunset also becomes a unifying symbol, not just for the Greasers and Socs, but for people everywhere—when we step back, we're all just trying our best on the same earth.

☛ 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 47

### Explanation and Analysis

As Johnny, Two-Bit, and Ponyboy walk Cherry and Marcia home, the Blue Mustang appears, revealing Cherry's boyfriend Bob and his Soc friends. Ponyboy realizes this is the same Mustang and same Soc that attacked Johnny. In order to prevent a fight, Cherry and Marcia get in the car and drive off with Bob. Cherry apologizes to Ponyboy. She can't say hi to him in school or speak to him anymore: it's not personal, it's just the rules.

Afterwards Ponyboy and Johnny lay out and look at the stars. The altercation has set Ponyboy over the edge. He doesn't understand why he has to live with his brothers, why he can't afford a car, and moreover why he can't have a friendship with Cherry. The Socs can have all of those things. Ponyboy is furious at their entitlement, privilege, and cruelty. He is also heartbroken; Cherry was the only person who ever understood him and yet she has to maintain her reputation and not speak to him.

Here we see Ponyboy's frustration at his own position escalate to a potentially dangerous point. Instead of being

fearful of the Socs, he resents them, and he's angry at the lines drawn by their wealth. The empathy that Cherry has instilled in him is diminished by his frustration at the divide between gangs.


## 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."

**Related Characters:** Bob Sheldon, Ponyboy Curtis (speaker)

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 55

### Explanation and Analysis

After getting slapped by Darry for coming home late from the Drive-In, Ponyboy decides to get Johnny and run away from home. As they approach the local park, the infamous blue Mustang appears. Bob and four other Socs pull up to the boys. They chastise Johnny and Ponyboy for "picking up" their girlfriends. Then, in a leap of faith and bravery, Ponyboy stands up to the Socs, sparking what will become a brutal fight.



When Bob makes fun of his hair, Ponyboy responds to Bob's taunting with the same rhetoric, suggesting that the only difference between the two is their wealth. It is a superficial and pointless difference, and both are, in essence, "trash." This takes Bob over the edge, and he directs his gang of Socs to try to "clean" Ponyboy's greasy hair by shoving his face into a fountain in the park. In order to save him, Johnny uses the switchblade he's been carrying to stab Bob.


This scene shows Ponyboy somewhat bridging the divide between the Greasers and the Socs, but only in order to turn an insult back against his enemy. The closer the two communities get, the greater their hatred and need to define themselves against each other grows.

## 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis, Johnny Cade

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 77

### Explanation and Analysis



Johnny and Ponyboy are hiding out in an abandoned church. They are now fugitives. Several days have passed, and the boys are avoiding being outside during the day. One morning Ponyboy wakes up at dawn and watches the sunrise. Johnny awakes and sits with him, both admiring the natural beauty of the sun. Yet Johnny also laments the sunrise, wishing the sun would always stay red and low as it is in dawn. This reminds Ponyboy of the Robert Frost poem *Nothing Gold Can Stay*. He then recites the poem to Johnny. Johnny asks him what it means, but Ponyboy can't seem to explain it. He supposes that the beauty of the poem is that he doesn't know the meaning.

Here, Ponyboy reveals another part of his sensitivity to Johnny. Not only is he the introspective dreamer, but he also recites poetry and finds deep meaning in parts of life like the sunrise. The poem itself also represents the fleeting nature of youth and innocence. Staying "gold" is remaining in that beautiful, sparkling place in life where nothing can harm you. Staring at the sunrise with Johnny, Ponyboy is having a "gold" moment himself during a time of tumult and tragedy. But of course it cannot last.

## 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..."

**Related Characters:** Dallas Winston (speaker), Johnny Cade

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 89

### Explanation and Analysis

After five days of solitude, Dally arrives to the church where Ponyboy and Johnny are hiding out. Dally tells the boys that a massive war has broken out between the Socs and Greasers and that Cherry is acting as a spy, keeping the Greasers safe. Johnny feels guilty for putting Ponyboy in this situation, and tells Dally that he wants to turn himself in. Dally is frustrated that Johnny just didn't turn himself in five days ago when the incident happened. In this quote, Dally apologizes for being frustrated with Johnny. His anger is rooted in the fear that jail time will forever change the sensitive and sweet Johnny.

This is the first time we see sensitivity from the tough Dally. He wants to make sure Johnny doesn't end up like him—he wants to protect Johnny's innocence as any parent or older brother would, but particularly one who has experienced the harsh loss of his *own* innocence. Similar to Darry's self-sacrifice for Ponyboy, Dally shows the same deep emotional tie to and protectiveness of Johnny.

☞ 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Darry Curtis

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 98-99

### Explanation and Analysis

Ponyboy is sitting in a hospital waiting room. He has just been taken there in an ambulance. Hours before, he and Johnny found out that four children had set fire to the church they were hiding out in and were stuck inside. Instead of retreating, Johnny and Ponyboy ran through the flames to rescue them.

Darry and Sodapop arrive at the hospital in tears, hugging Ponyboy, thrilled that he is safe and devastated that he's





been hurt. Ponyboy looks at Darry and sees the tears streaming down his face. He hugs him close, and in that moment Ponyboy realizes that Darry's sternness isn't doesn't come from a lack of love, but rather is his way of keeping his brother safe. Every day he must make the choice to mask the grief of losing their parents in order to be the caretaker of Sodapop and Ponyboy. He cannot afford to be the child that Ponyboy and Sodapop are—he must be the parent. This moment begins a healing process for the Curtis boys. It also reveals the level of self-sacrifice Darry has committed to in order to care for his brothers.

## 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."

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Two-Bit Mathews, Johnny Cade

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 107

### Explanation and Analysis

The morning after Ponyboy returns from the hospital, Two-Bit and Steve visit. Two-Bit shows Ponyboy the article that has been written up about him in the local newspaper. He laments the headline JUVENILE DELINQUENTS TURN HEROES, saying that the newspaper was wrong about them "turning" into heroes. They were always heroes.

The headline of the article signifies the way Greasers are perceived by their own community, signifying another divide—this one between young gang members and the community at large. The Greasers (and probably Socs as well) are written off as criminals from the start, and not judged as normal young people. It is only in an instance of deep self-sacrifice and self-endangerment that Ponyboy and Johnny are considered "heroes." The article also outlines the entire story up until this point: the murder, the turf wars, an interview from Cherry and Ponyboy and Johnny's life story. The article ends with a suggestion that Ponyboy may be sent to juvenile court for running away. In this case, he may be put into a boys' home and taken away from Sodapop and Darry.

☝ "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."

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis, Randy Adderson (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 117

### Explanation and Analysis

Ponyboy has run into Randy, Marcia's boyfriend and a friend of Bob, the murdered Soc. Randy pulls Ponyboy aside and tells him that he would have never had the guts to save those children from the burning church. He also tells him that he wouldn't have ever believed a "Greaser" could do something like that. Ponyboy challenges him, saying that being a Greaser had nothing to do with it.

Randy tells Johnny he won't be coming to the Rumble between the Greasers and Socs that evening. He tells Ponyboy that Bob was so tough because he was never disciplined. He lived in a world of privilege where his parents took the blame for all of his actions. And, even if the Greasers won the rumble, they would still be poor and the Socs would still be rich. The Bobs of the world will always exist, and violence doesn't change anything. Randy turns to leave and Ponyboy then responds with this quote.

Here, the humanity of both the Greasers and the Socs are revealed to Ponyboy. Once again, Ponyboy reinforces the idea that anyone can be a hero, and he is reminded of Cherry's perspective that things are truly "rough all over." Through these moments, Ponyboy and readers alike begin to see that empathy and understanding are the keys to resolving the conflict between the two groups.

☝ 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 118

### Explanation and Analysis

After talking with Randy about the death of Bob, Ponyboy's


friends call him over, asking him what they spoke about. Two-Bit asks, "What did Mr. Soc have to say?" to which Ponyboy responds, "He ain't a Soc...He's just a guy." This is a key moment for Ponyboy. He not only understands that while they still live in conflict, the Socs are just as human as the Greasers, but he also says it aloud to his friends. He is beginning to discover the importance of empathy and *words* as opposed to violence. "Greasers" is just a label, the same way Soc is. While it is an important identifier in this community, it does not make up the whole of the individual.

## 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."

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis, Cherry Valance (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 129-130



### Explanation and Analysis

After visiting Johnny in the hospital, Ponyboy and Two-Bit run into Cherry who has news about the rumble that evening. Ponyboy and Cherry talk. He asks her if she is going to visit Johnny and she says no. She is loyal to the Socs and she can't look at the man who killed someone she loved, even if he may have deserved it. This infuriates Ponyboy. He responds by telling Cherry that her spying and helping them out doesn't make up for the guilt she should be feeling. She doesn't have to worry about the same things as they do—she has everything and they have nothing. Cherry is hurt, and this quote is Ponyboy's own way of apologizing. He realizes that he was using her wealth as ammunition instead of learning from the lessons she taught him. Once again, the sunset becomes the symbol of unification. They all look at the same sunset at the end of the day, they are all human, and they all hurt. They find common ground in the sunsets they both see and for now, that has to be enough.

## 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Sodapop Curtis, Darry Curtis, Two-Bit Mathews

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 137

### Explanation and Analysis

Just hours before the rumble, Ponyboy and his brothers sit around, eating and prepping for the night ahead. Here, Ponyboy asks the others why they fight. Each boy has a different reason and each reason represents something different about the nature of their gang and their social positions. Darry fights for the pride of his group and the love of his family. Soda loves a good fight. He always seeks adventure. Two-bit just follows the group. Yet when he thinks about his own reasons for fighting, Ponyboy can't figure out why or if he likes it. He realizes how different he is from his fellow gang members. He doesn't want to fight with fists, but hasn't quite figured out how to fight with words. His cohorts seem to know who they are, but Ponyboy is still lost in his search for an identity apart from just a "Greasers."

☛☛ 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...

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Paul Holden

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 143

### Explanation and Analysis

The Greasers arrive at the rumble, followed by the Socs. The groups agree to only fight with fists. Darry steps forward and asks if anyone would like to fight him. Paul Holden emerges from the group. He is a Soc, who was on Darry's high school football team. The two were friends in school but now, at the rumble, are social enemies. Once

again Ponyboy notices that the only difference between Darry and Paul, and thereby the Greasers and Socs, is their wealth. Paul was able to go to college after high school. Darry couldn't. This moment uncovers how easily friendships and relationships can be broken by allegiance to their respective gangs and social positions. Ponyboy follows up this moment by telling the readers that he doesn't agree with what has been happening, and he doesn't "hate Socs anymore." Because of his newfound empathy for his supposed enemies, he regrets being involved in the rumble, and now knows that fighting isn't the answer.

☞ "We won," Dally panted. "We beat the Socs. We stomped them—chased them out our territory." Johnny didn't even try to grin at him. "Useless...fighting's no good..."

**Related Characters:** Dallas Winston, Johnny Cade (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 148

### Explanation and Analysis

After the Greasers win the rumble, Dally takes Ponyboy to the hospital to see Johnny. When they arrive, the Doctor informs them that Johnny is dying. They go into Johnny's room and tell him that they've won the rumble. Johnny isn't impressed by this. He knows that fighting won't change anything. They will never "win" against the Socs. They will always be seen as the dirty low-lives of the community, and there is very little that can change that. As he approaches the end of his life, Johnny also begins to realize what is truly important. It isn't gang wars or violence, but rather preserving one's identity, sense of self, and close community of friends and family.

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

**Related Characters:** Johnny Cade (speaker), Ponyboy Curtis

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 149

### Explanation and Analysis

The moment before Johnny dies, he pulls Ponyboy close to him and tells him (in the book's most famous quote) to "stay gold." He is referring to the Robert Frost poem Ponyboy recited to him during their time hiding out in the church. These immortal last words are used to urge Ponyboy to maintain his idealism and heart—to try to resist the entropy Frost's poem suggests and somehow maintain his innocence. Johnny knows it's too late for himself—he has lost his "gold"—but it's not too late for Ponyboy, and so he asks Ponyboy to preserve his own childhood. Johnny has realized what is important in life during the last moments of his own.

## 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Dallas Winston, Johnny Cade

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 154

### Explanation and Analysis

After returning with the news of Johnny's death, Ponyboy and his brothers set out to find Dally, who has run off. They meet Dally at a parking lot. He has just robbed a bank and the police are on his tail. He carries an unloaded gun and as the police get closer, he brandishes the gun and is shot by the police. Here, Ponyboy reflects on the look of satisfaction on Dally's face as he is shot down. He has always wanted to die, and now that Johnny is gone he has a reason to.



Ponyboy then reflects on Dally's death. He will never be written up as a hero, but he died the way he wanted to, with a sense of bravery and for him, dignity. It was the last shred of honor he had. We also learn just how much Dally valued Johnny's life. Keeping him safe and out of trouble was the reason why Dally kept going. He failed at preserving Johnny's "gold"—his innocence. Without Johnny, Dally is simply a delinquent and has nothing to live for, except for

the grandeur of his own death. In many ways, Dally has spent his life sacrificing himself for Johnny, and this moment is his grand finale.

## 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Bob Sheldon

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 162

### Explanation and Analysis

Stuck in bed sick with nothing to do, Ponyboy flips through one of Sodapop's old year books. He finds a picture of Bob, and wonders what he was really like as a person. He then tries to imagine Bob through Cherry's eyes. What did she think of him? What did she like about him?

Once again Cherry acts as the window through which Ponyboy is able to empathize with the Socs. Ponyboy begins to see Bob as a human, realizing that while he embodied a lot of negative traits, he was scared, just like Ponyboy and just like the Greasers every single day. Once again, we see Ponyboy as a youthful voice of empathy and understanding, someone who is just discovering that problems are resolved through making an effort to humanize and empathize with others.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

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

**Related Characters:** Two-Bit Mathews (speaker), Ponyboy Curtis

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 171

### Explanation and Analysis

Since the deaths of Johnny and Dally, Ponyboy's outlook on

life has completely changed. His grades are dropping, he is forgetful and absentminded, and he doesn't seem to care about getting into trouble anymore. After school one day, a group of Socs approach him, looking for trouble. The normally even-tempered Ponyboy breaks a glass bottle and threatens to slash them. Two-bit is shocked by this, and he tells Ponyboy to not "get tough." He realizes the beauty of Ponyboy's sensitivity and empathy, and he urges Ponyboy to not lose that. This moment also brings up the recurring themes of preserving and losing childhood innocence. We have seen Ponyboy slowly lose the innocence he has maintained throughout the book until this point. But not all is lost, and after Two-bit tells him this, Ponyboy bends down to clean up the broken glass to keep anyone from getting a flat tire. Two-bit smirks, realizing that Ponyboy will always "stay gold."

☝☝ "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."

**Related Characters:** Sodapop Curtis (speaker), Darry Curtis, Ponyboy Curtis, Dallas Winston

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 176

### Explanation and Analysis

Darry and Ponyboy have gotten into another argument and Sodapop can't take it anymore. He runs off. Darry and Ponyboy then chase him down, and Soda tells them that he's sick of being stuck in the middle of every argument. He understands both sides and feels like he's being torn apart by his two brothers. Darry has given up everything to make sure Ponyboy has the opportunities he never had, but he also can be incredibly critical and overprotective. Soda is left to manage the two of them and has reached a breaking point.

Soda explains that they are all each other has left. He worries that they will end up like Dallas, tough and empty, with nothing to live for. They must live for each other. This is the only moment in *The Outsiders* where we see the bubbly, high-energy Sodapop break down. He is the link between Darry and Ponyboy, between the innocent and the father figure. He also makes it clear to Ponyboy how much Darry

has sacrificed—a college education, jobs, a future—in order to protect him.

“ 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.

**Related Characters:** Johnny Cade (speaker), Ponyboy Curtis, Dallas Winston

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 



**Page Number:** 178-179

### Explanation and Analysis

Before he died, Johnny made sure that Ponyboy received his copy of *Gone With The Wind*. During this moment, Ponyboy opens the book and sees a note that Johnny has written to him. Close to his death, Johnny realized the meaning of the Robert Frost poem Ponyboy recited in their hideout at the church. To stay gold is to stay young, to preserve one's innocence and always see the world as new, like the dawn. This is why Johnny tells him to stay gold before his death. It is another moment where someone is urging Ponyboy to preserve his innocence, because it's too late for everyone else. He is special, and his entire community of Greasers knows it. This moment gives Ponyboy a sense of universal empathy. He thinks about the other boys living on the “wrong” side of town, without opportunity. Ponyboy is inspired, and he realizes that someone should do something about this. He then begins to write.

“ 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.

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  


**Page Number:** 179

### Explanation and Analysis

Johnny's note to Ponyboy makes him realize that there are other entire communities of young people without opportunities, just like the Greasers or even worse off—kids that are limited by their poverty, their appearance, or their zip code. Boys who watch the same sunsets and dream of a better life. After this epiphany, Ponyboy calls his English teacher, who has given him an assignment to write on any theme he wants. He asks his teacher if he can write a longer paper. He realizes that this, these boys, and this moment is what he wants to write about. His own identity is found through the pen, not through gang allegiance, rumbles, or poverty.

“ 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...

**Related Characters:** Ponyboy Curtis (speaker), Johnny Cade, Dallas Winston, Bob Sheldon

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 180

### Explanation and Analysis

Johnny's letter to Ponyboy has made Ponyboy realize that his problems, his poverty, and his struggles aren't exclusive to him. There are other kids out there, living the same life. He decides to write about this for his English assignment—taking a risk and writing the truth. Ponyboy realizes in this moment that in order to make change happen, to give opportunities to boys like himself, he has to share his own story. He has now come full circle, just as the

book itself has. He realizes that the empathy and innocence he has always struggled with can be used to do good, and that the pen is mightier than the sword (or switch blade). The book itself also comes full circle when we learn that the first line of his essay is the first line of *The Outsiders*. Ponyboy's essay has become the book in our hands. His story is heard, and his voice is shared.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## 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.

*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 Dally and Johnny's childhoods were both fraught with violence, signaling 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.*



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 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 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.

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.

## 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.

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

*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.*



*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.*



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



*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.*



*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.

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.

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.

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.

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'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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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 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.

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.

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 Merril. 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.

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.

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.

## 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 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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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.

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?"

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.

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.

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.

*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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

*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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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.

*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.*



## 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.

*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.*



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.

*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.*



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.

*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.*



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.

*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.*



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.

*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.

*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.*



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.

*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 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.

*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.*



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.

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



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.

*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.*





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.

*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 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.

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



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.

*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.*



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.

*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.*



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



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.

*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.

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 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.

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.

*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 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*



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



*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.

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.

*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.*



*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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

*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...*



*...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.*



*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.*



*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.*



*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.

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*.

*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.*



*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.*





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