

# The Outsiders Summary

By S. E. Hinton, 1967

## Chapter 1

Ponyboy Curtis, our first-person narrator, begins to tell us a story where he was walking home one afternoon after watching a Paul Newman movie, and was thinking about how he wanted to look like him despite feeling comfortable and liking his own greaser look.



- Paul Newman was an actor and humanitarian.
  - Born in 1925 in Ohio, USA
  - Co-founder of Safe Water Network, which is a nonprofit that develops sustainable drinking water solutions for those in need.
  - Founded the SeriousFun Children's Network, which is a global family of summer camps for children with serious illnesses.
- It makes sense that Ponyboy looks up to Paul Newman because he is not only popular with both men and women, but he was also a fantastic human being. His values and ideals were very similar to Ponyboy's, which inspires his ambition as a 14-year old boy.

He enjoys watching movies alone, but he prefers to walk home with company because it is unsafe for his social class; the East Side gang. When alone, they attract the Socials (rival gang) who are the West Side gang. Greasers are poor and classified as more wild than the Socs. They put animal grease in their hair, dress tough by wearing steel in their boots, carry switchblades in their pockets as a weapon of self-defence. All this is to help them stand their ground against the Socs.

- The theme of injustice is portrayed here, for a good kid is easily attacked simply for being born in the working class gang.
- The necessity for survival depends on the greasers carrying weapons and dressing with clothes that also act as weapons, for the main purpose of self-defence.

Ponyboy explains to the reader that he does not participate in the typical Greaser mischief because his older brother, Darry (Darrel) would kill him if he got into trouble. His parents died in a car crash, so he and his two brothers live by themselves. If any one of them get into trouble, they would be separated by the law, so keeping an upstanding image is fundamental. Darry is 20 years old, and is considered the head of the family because he is the only legal adult. His other brother, Sodapop, is 16.

- The theme of an imbalanced family is portrayed here, for Ponyboy's family, being run by a 20-year old, with two brothers that work full-time solely for the purpose of surviving.
  - Also shows how controlled they are, for if any of them commit a felony, or even just a mischievous act, they will be separated for good.

Despite Ponyboy's intelligence and well-mannered nature, he lacks common sense, which frustrated Darry to no end, causing him to act very strict and often yells at him.

- Despite this quality bothering Darry, it is actually quite normal for a 14-year old boy to lack common sense, which also shows how much pressure American society put on people and kids of a lesser social standing.

While he is walking he notices a red corvair trailing him, so he quickened his pace, while also remembering how badly the Socs beat his friend, Johnny Cade. The corvair pulls up beside Ponyboy and five Socs come out asking if he needs a haircut. They proceed to beat him up not before Sodapop and Darry come out to rescue him after hearing his cries for help. The Socs are successfully chased away and Darry scolds him for walking home alone instead of calling for a ride.



- A Corvair is a high-end model pertaining to Chevrolet and in the 60s, this model cost about \$2,000 USD, which is equivalent to \$17,500 USD today.

- This car, if found, wouldn't cost less than \$30,000 USD today.

- In this scene, Ponyboy's fear of being attacked is realized.

- The reader can also get an idea of how violent and trigger-happy the Socs were in this time. It was always the Greasers who had the rotten infamy, but

they are just as bad or worse.

- They pick a fight over anything; his hair being different to theirs.

The three brothers and other Greasers make plans for the following night. Ponyboy decides that he and Johnny will go see a feature film at the drive-in with their other friend, Dally. Dally begins to talk about his ex-girlfriend, Sylvia, and Ponyboy starts thinking about the type of girls that socialize with the greasers. He wonders what it would be like to spend time with an upper-class Soc girl.

- The fact that Ponyboy wonders what kind of girls hang out with the Socs goes to show how absolutely divided society was. He went to school with them, but still had no idea what kind of people they were.
- We also gain more empathy for Sodapop because as a 16-year old we see how loyal he is by his words and desires.

At home, Ponyboy, reads *Great Expectations*, and identifies himself as Pip because of the life they both live. Still shaken by his fight with the Socs he climbs into bed with Sodapop. The brothers talk about Sodapop's girlfriend, Sandy, whom he hopes to marry one day.

- *Great Expectations* is a novel by Charles Dickens from the post-Victorian Era in England from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

- Pip, the narrator and protagonist, is a young boy who is romantic and immature, much like Ponyboy.
  - Pip is known for having a good conscience, which helps him develop throughout the novel and helps bring him from a poor boy to gaining status in the high-class society in London at the time.
  - S. E. Hinton is foreshadowing a possible future for Ponyboy.

## Chapter 2

The next night, Ponyboy and Johnny go with Dally to the double-feature and sit behind a pair of Soc girls. Dally begins to talk dirty to them in an attempt to embarrass them, but the red-headed girl coolly turns around to call him out. He goes to grab more soda, and Ponyboy starts talking to her, Cherry Valance. They talk about the rodeo and his brother, Sodapop, whom she describes as a "doll" and asks what happened to him. Embarrassed, Ponyboy explains he had to drop out of school to work at the gas station because they needed more money.

- Ponyboy's desire to get to know Socs' girls comes true, for because of Dally's harassment towards them, he is able to talk to Cherry and get to know her a little bit.
- This scene also portrays the dark side to the Greasers, which is personified through Dally; he is quick to act out and harass people he knows can't fight him back; he is doing exactly what was done to Ponyboy earlier.
- The grey area between the Socs and the Greasers becomes more filled out, for the mutual interests between Cherry and Ponyboy act as a connecting bind.
  - Not to mention, that Cherry once knew his brother, Sodapop, before he was forced to drop out.

Dally comes back and offers a coke to Cherry, but she just dumps it on his face. He then proceeds to try and put his arm around her, and then Johnny steps into to tell him not to bother the girls. This stuns Dally because Johnny is usually very quiet and shy.

- Dally's false kindness toward Cherry is actually an act of malice; he only buys a coke so that she will stop ignoring him.
  - Getting a reaction out of her is the only thing he was looking for, however, when Johnny stands up to him for the girls, Dally becomes enraged and instead of taking it out on his gang he goes to slash another gang leader's tires.
    - Dally's anger issues all stem from injustice in his life while also living up to his expectations as "greaser scum"; he is doing exactly what society has taught him he should do.

Dally stalks off, and the two girls, Cherry and Marcia invite Ponyboy and Johnny to sit beside them to watch the movie. Two-bit, another greaser friend comes up to them and informs them that Dally has just slashed Tim Shephard's tires looking to pick a fight with him. Tim Shepard is the leader of another greaser gang. Two-Bit explains the greasers' two main rules: always stick together and never get caught.

- Two-Bit coming to find Johnny and Ponyboy exemplifies the Honour Code gangs have; for if one is in trouble, no matter the reason or who started it, they must all support each other.
  - This comes from the law of influence of the law during the time

Ponyboy and Cherry go to get popcorn, and he starts to tell her about the time the Socs beat up Johnny. It was the leader of the Socs gang, and came wearing a fistful of rings. Distressed, Cherry explains that not all Socs are that violent and they all have problems just like they do, but Ponyboy doesn't believe her.

- Ponyboy takes advantage of finding the grey area between the two gangs and explains to Cherry that not all greasers are like Dally, for he is a prime example, and there are also Socs who are evil if not moreso.
  - To this Cherry agrees, but also lets Ponyboy know that like he is a good person and a greaser there are also Socs who are good.
- Hinton shows the constant conflict between the Greasers and the Socs, but also explains that they are not as different as they appear.
  - Greaser feels their distress very clearly, while the Socs pretend their problems do not exist, and both their methods of coping are equally destructive.

In these two chapters the main concern of the author is to establish the social classes and also the effects they have on each other, especially young people, who really are learning from example.

Hinton defines her characters well; she creates a solid character development for each of them individually, not in proportion to their social group, but based on their individual characteristics.

Ponyboy is not a young street youth, but a young boy who likes to read and watch sunsets (romantic ideal).

- He is a natural role, which Hinton did on purpose, for she wanted a neutral character to take us through her world.
  - Keeping in mind Hinton was a Socs in her time, but she writes a novel from the perspective of a greaser, she is probably describing herself, but as a boy from the opposite class.

Darry is presented as a struggling young man who has had to abandon education, which is the only means a person has to escape the working class.

- He abandons himself for his family and sacrifices everything in his life to raise his two younger brothers.
- This also shows that the greasers probably have a greater sense of grounding morals than the Socs because they only have each other and are more interested in keeping that connection than any material thing.
  - Also the sense of responsibility is greater.

The male-female relationships are the kinds of friendships that are more likely to result in peace between the groups.

- All encounters between male greasers and male socs result in violence, whereas the encounters between male greasers and female socs result in laughter and flirtation.
  - This difference suggests that gang rivalry stems from male hatred of other males
- Female greasers, however don't exist in this novel; they are merely suggested.
  - Their absence empathizes the intense male bonding among the greasers.