

The Outsiders Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

Class: How does this novel speak to class systems and social status? Do you think these ideas and questions are relevant today? Why or why not?

Problem Novel: Many early works of adolescent fiction very purposefully show a teenager who faces a particular problem and learns an important lesson. How does *The Outsiders* shift this model and/or break from these kinds of stories?

Culture: Critics believe that Johnny is a Native American character and have criticized Hinton for playing into stereotypes in this categorization. Do you agree?

Death: Scholars suggest that adolescents often die for one of two reasons in YA fiction—because they need to stay innocent (sometimes portrayed as a sacrificial death) or they cannot grow up. What characters in the story fit into these models?

Intertextuality: The text mentions Robert Frost's poem "Nature's First Green" and the novel *Gone with the Wind*. How do these intertextual references impact the story, and why would Hinton choose to include them?

Author: Hinton has been known to comment that she felt she was a "soc" and wrote in part to defend "greasers." Do you think she captures this intent?

Daybook Possibilities

- Consider the use of point of view in the novel, and write a scene from the point of view of another character. How does this change the story?
- Do some research into the setting (time and location) of the text. Where does it take place and when? How does this affect the way characters and actions are portrayed?
- Use the internet to research other classic or foundational works of adolescent literature. How does *The Outsiders* compare?
- List observations about teens you see in your everyday life. What do they wear? What activities do they engage in? How do they speak or behave?
- *The Outsiders* was first published in 1967. Do a little research into what occurred during that year and google important events. Can you make any connections to the novel in your investigation?
- Watch the 1983 film version of *The Outsiders*. How does the film modify the original and why?
- Collect news articles featuring mention of gangs or gang related violence from contemporary times and the 1960s. How have perceptions of teen violence and gangs changed?

Suggested Critical Reading

- "The Irony of Narration in Young Adult Fiction" by Mike Cadden
- "Boyology in the Twentieth Century" by Kenneth Kidd
- "Young Adult Literature Evades the Theorists" by Caroline Hunt
- *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Rebellion in Adolescent Literature* by Roberta Seelinger Trites

Articles can be located using the Project Muse database through Lupton Library's website.

Background and Context

Written in 1967, *The Outsiders* was written by SE Hinton when she was a freshman at the University of Tulsa. Hinton was awarded the first Margaret A. Edwards Award, and her book has sold more than 8 million copies, considered one of the first novels marketed specifically to teens. *The Outsiders* is the story of two gangs—the greasers and the "socs" (from social)—and is told from the perspective of fourteen-year-old Ponyboy.