

ELA 9 The Outsiders Study Guide

The Outsiders is set in Oklahoma in the 1960s. The hatred between the poor greasers and rich Socs, however, is not restricted to this time and place. The message of the story is as real today as it was then. The attitudes of people in the 1960s (even though they look different on the outside) are still evident everywhere you look today. Stereotypes still exist and lead to misunderstandings that range from trivial arguments to tragic endings.

Character List

Below is a list of the major characters.

Ponyboy Curtis: He is the main character and narrator of the story. He is a member of the greasers, but has a deeper side.

Sodapop Curtis: He is the good-looking, happy-go-lucky middle brother in the Curtis family (Ponyboy, Sodapop, Darry). The favorite brother of Ponyboy, Sodapop represents the good-natured, fun-loving side of the greasers gang.

Darry Curtis: He is the stern oldest brother of the Curtis family. Once a star athlete, Darry represents the adult/parental influence in the family.

Johnny Cade: He is the brooding, nervous member of the greasers, Johnny is like everyone's kid brother. The gang looks out for him and seems to care for him more than any other. Despite a rough family life at home, Johnny is a sensitive, caring person with hope for the future, even in the midst of great conflicts.

Dallas (Dally) Winston: He is the seasoned veteran of the greasers gang, Dally is the person everyone looks up to, although they don't necessarily approve of his rough, hardened behavior. Dally represents the rebellious side of the greasers.

Two-Bit Matthews: He is the fun-loving clown of the group, Two-Bit is smart and street savvy and keeps everyone laughing.

Cherry Valance: She is the pretty, soft hearted Soc who befriends Ponyboy and helps the greasers.

Bob Sheldon: He is Cherry's Soc boyfriend and friend of Randy.

Marcia: She is Cherry's friend and girlfriend of Randy.

Randy Adderson: He is Marcia's Soc boyfriend and friend of Bob.

Steve Randle: He is cocky, streetwise member of the greasers gang, expert car mechanic and best friend of Sodapop.

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Study Questions

These questions help you stay on track with the plot as well as build your reading comprehension. Preview the questions before reading—then make sure you can answer each question after reading. If you can't answer a question, reread that part of the chapter.

Chapter 1

1. Who is the narrator of this story?
2. Why do you think Ponyboy likes the movies so much?
3. What happens to Ponyboy when he leaves the movies?
4. How does Ponyboy define “family”?
5. What is a Soc? A greaser? Why are they rivals?
6. Socs are known for wearing what?
7. What kind of relationship does Ponyboy have with his two brothers, Darry and Sodapop?
8. What sport did Darry play in school?
9. Where does Sodapop work?
10. Who is Soda's girlfriend?
11. How does Ponyboy describe each of the other characters?
12. Which characters does Ponyboy seem to be closest to?
13. What happened to Ponyboy's parents?

Chapter 2

1. Who do Ponyboy and Johnny meet at the movies?
2. Why is Johnny Cade so nervous and scared all the time?
3. Do the greasers like being called greasers?
4. Why does Ponyboy feel the greasers have it so much worse than the Socs?
5. How are Cherry and Marcia different from the girls the greasers normally hang out with?
6. What does Cherry mean when she tells Ponyboy “things are rough all over”?

Chapter 3

2. Ponyboy tells Cherry a personal story about Sodapop; what is it?
3. Cherry says at one point that she “admires” Dally and later that she “could fall in love” with him. Why do you think she feels this way?
4. What does Ponyboy mean when he says to Cherry, “Just don't forget that some of us watch the sunset too”?
5. Cherry tells Ponyboy, “Did you ever hear of having more than you wanted?” What does she mean?
6. Ponyboy feels Darry doesn't love him as much as Sodapop. Why?
7. Why does Ponyboy love being in the country so much?

Chapter 4

1. What kind of car do the Socs drive?
2. Why do the Socs trail Johnny and Ponyboy in the park?
3. What do they do to Ponyboy?
4. Why does Johnny kill the Soc? Did he do the right thing? Why or why not?
5. How does Dally react when Ponyboy and Johnny tell him about the murder?
6. How do Ponyboy and Johnny get away?
7. Ponyboy sees Johnny in a new way after they have fled. Why does he look at him

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differently?

12. What does Ponyboy mean when he says “there are things worse than being a greaser”?

Chapter 5

1. What do Ponyboy and Johnny do once in hiding?
2. How is their hair an important part of who the greasers are?
4. How do Ponyboy and Johnny pass the time while in hiding?
5. Who wrote the poem Ponyboy recites?
6. Why does Johnny like *Gone with the Wind* so much?
7. What does Ponyboy mean when he says “Dally was so real he scared me”?
8. What do you think the sunset symbolizes for Ponyboy?

Chapter 6

1. What does Ponyboy mean when he says, “it wasn’t Cherry the Soc who was helping us, it was Cherry the dreamer who watched sunsets and couldn’t stand fights”?
3. Why does Johnny think they should turn themselves in?
4. What conflict do Ponyboy, Johnny, and Dally encounter when they return to their hideout after lunch?
5. Who goes into the fire?
6. What does Dally do when Ponyboy emerges from the flames?
7. Who is most injured in the fire?
8. How do Darry and Sodapop react when they see Ponyboy at the hospital?

Chapter 7

3. Darry tells the doctor that he, Ponyboy and Soda are “about as much family as Dally and Johnny had.” What does he mean?
4. Ponyboy comments that “greasers don’t cry in front of strangers.” Why?
5. After returning home, Ponyboy discovers what in the newspaper?
6. Does Ponyboy see himself as a hero? Why or why not?
8. What does Ponyboy dream about in his recurring nightmare?
9. Why does Randy come to see Ponyboy?
10. What does Randy mean when he tells Ponyboy that the greasers can’t win the fight with the Socs?

Chapter 8

1. What is the extent of Johnny’s injuries after the fire?
2. What does he ask Dally and Ponyboy for while in the hospital?
3. What does Dally ask from Two-Bit while he is in the hospital?
4. Why does Dally want to fight in the rumble?
5. What does living on the streets teach you, according to Ponyboy?
6. Why doesn’t Johnny want to see his mother?
7. Two-Bit tells Ponyboy that “the only thing that keeps Darry from bein’ a Soc is us”. What does he mean?
8. How is Darry different from the other greasers?
9. Why do you think Cherry wants to help the greasers?
10. What message does she bring to Ponyboy about the rumble?

Chapter 9

1. Why do the greasers fix themselves up and put extra grease on their hair before the rumble?

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2. Where is the rumble to take place?
4. Who starts the fighting at the rumble?
5. Who shows up unexpectedly at the rumble?
6. Did the greasers really win the rumble? Why or why not?
7. What do Ponyboy and Dally do after the rumble?

Chapter 10

1. What does Ponyboy do after leaving the hospital?
2. Why does Ponyboy have such a hard time accepting what happens to Johnny?
3. Who takes him home?
4. Who tells the gang that Johnny is dead?
5. Why does the gang go looking for Dally?
6. Ponyboy realizes that Johnny is the only thing Dally really loved. Why do you think Dally loves Johnny?
7. Why does Ponyboy describe Dally with a look of triumph on his face as he crumples under the streetlight?
8. What does Ponyboy do when Dally is shot?
9. Who does Ponyboy ask for while he is in bed?
10. Ponyboy says that Dally and Johnny are better off now that they are dead. What do you think?

Chapter 11

1. Ponyboy is delirious for several days and has to do what?
2. Who visits Ponyboy while he is in recovery?
3. Why does Ponyboy tell Randy that he is the one who killed Bob, not Johnny?
4. Why is Johnny so important to Ponyboy?

Chapter 12

1. What happens when Ponyboy goes to court?
2. What is the only thing the judge asks Ponyboy?
3. What happens to Ponyboy after court?
4. What does Ponyboy do when three Socs approach him after his court appearance?
5. What advice does Two-Bit give Ponyboy?
8. How is Ponyboy not like the rest of the greasers?
9. Why does Sodapop run away at the end?
10. What happens when Darry and Ponyboy catch up to Sodapop?
11. What does Johnny leave for Ponyboy?
12. What does Johnny's letter say?
13. What theme does Ponyboy decide to write for his English class at the end of the book?

Themes, Symbols, Motifs

Be able to analyze the following themes and symbols found in the story:

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

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Two-Bit's Switchblade

Two-Bit's switchblade is his most prized possession and, in several ways, represents the disregard for authority for which greasers traditionally pride themselves. First of all, the blade is stolen. Second, it represents a sense of the individual power that comes with the potential to commit violence. This symbolism surfaces most clearly when Dally borrows the blade from Two-Bit and uses it to break out of the hospital to join his gang at the rumble. It is fitting that Two-Bit finally loses the blade when the police confiscate it from Dally's dead body. The loss of the weapon, at this point, becomes inextricably linked with the loss of Dally—a figure who embodies individual power and authority.

Cars

Cars represent the Socs power and the greasers' vulnerability. Because their parents can afford to buy them their "tuff" cars, the Socs have increased mobility and protection. The greasers, who move mostly on foot, are physically vulnerable in comparison to the Socs. Still, greasers like Darry, Sodapop, and Steve do have contact with automobiles—they repair them. We can interpret this interaction with cars positively or negatively. On one hand, it symbolizes how the greasers have a more direct and well-rounded experience than the Socs with the gritty realities of life. On the other hand, the fact that the greasers must service and care for Soc possessions demonstrates that the Socs have the power to oppress the greasers.

Bob's Rings

Bob Sheldon's rings function similarly to the Socs' cars. Throughout literature, rings and jewelry have been traditional symbols of wealth. The rings in this story represent the physical power that accompanies wealth. By using his rings as combative weapons, Bob takes advantage of his economic superiority over Ponyboy and the other greasers, using his wealth to injure his opponents.

Greaser Hair

The greasers cannot afford rings, cars, or other physical trappings of power that the Socs enjoy. Consequently, they must resort to more affordable markers of identity. By wearing their hair in a specific style, greasers distinguish themselves from other social groups. Conservative cultural values of the 1960s called for men to keep their hair short, and the greaser style is a clear transgression of this social convention. It is not only distinctive, but, as a physical characteristic, this hair is truly an organic part of the greaser persona. When the Socs jump Ponyboy at the beginning of the novel, they ask him if he wants a haircut and threaten to cut off his hair. By doing so, they would rob him of his identity.

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Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor

The Outsiders tells the story of two groups of teenagers whose bitter rivalry stems from socioeconomic differences. However, Hinton suggests, these differences in social class do not necessarily make natural enemies of the two groups. The greasers and Socs share some things in common. Cherry Valance, a Soc, and Ponyboy Curtis, a greaser, discuss their shared love of literature, popular music, and sunsets, transcending—if only temporarily—the divisions that feed the feud between their respective groups. Their harmonious conversation suggests that shared passions can fill in the gap between rich and poor. This potential for agreement marks a bright spot in the novel's gloomy prognosis that the battle between the classes is a long-lasting one. Over the course of the novel, Ponyboy begins to see the pattern of shared experience. He realizes that the hardships that greasers and Socs face may take different practical forms, but that the members of both groups—and youths everywhere—must inevitably come to terms with fear, love, and sorrow.

Honor Among the Lawless

The idea of honorable action appears throughout the novel, and it works as an important component of the greaser behavioral code. Greasers see it as their duty, Ponyboy says, to stand up for each other in the face of enemies and authorities. In particular, we see acts of honorable duty from Dally Winston, a character who is primarily defined by his delinquency and lack of refinement. Ponyboy informs us that once, in a show of group solidarity, Dally let himself be arrested for a crime that Two-Bit had committed. Furthermore, when discussing *Gone with the Wind*, Johnny says that he views Dally as a Southern gentleman, as a man with a fixed personal code of behavior. Statements like Johnny's, coupled with acts of honorable sacrifice throughout the narrative, demonstrate that courtesy and propriety can exist even among the most lawless of social groups.