

# DURHAM COUNTY LIBRARY

## Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

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*The Outsiders*  
by  
S. E. Hinton  
(New York: Speak, 2006.)

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### **Author:**

Born in 1950, Susan Eloise Hinton was raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She was an avid reader as a child and experimented with writing by the time she turned ten. Her early stories were about cowboys and horses, and she preferred plots with rough riding and gunfights. When Hinton reached her teens, however, she could not find anything pleasing to read. Adult literature was still a bit too complicated for her, while literature for teens consisted of innocent tales about girls finding boyfriends. To please herself, she decided to create a different fictional universe from these annoying "Mary Jane goes to the prom" novels. She wanted to create a realistic story about being a teen. Additionally, like her character Ponyboy, she wanted to record some events of her high school years. She took inspiration from real events and people to create a story of class warfare between teens. After working on the novel for a year and a half and through four re-writes, she let a friend's mother read it. The mother liked it enough to refer her to an agent, Marilyn Marlow of the Curtis Brown Agency. A contract offering publication arrived during Hinton's high-school graduation ceremonies.



*The Outsiders* was published in 1967, when the author was just seventeen. Susan Eloise shortened her name to S. E. Hinton so that boys would not know the author was female. It was published to critical acclaim, won several awards, and became a cult classic among teen readers. The success of *The Outsiders* enabled Hinton to go to the University of Tulsa, where she earned a B.S. in Education in 1970. While in school she met her future husband, David Inhofe, who encouraged her to write her second novel, *That Was Then, This Is Now* (1971). Over the next decade, she published a new novel every four years. In 1975, she published *Rumble Fish*, and *Tex* in 1979. Although she was no longer an adolescent herself, Hinton was still able to bring her sympathy for teens and insight into their lives to her work. She only published one work in the 1980s, 1988's *Taming the Star Runner*, and in the 1990s she has focused more on picture books for younger readers than on novels. [From enotes.com]

**Summary:**

The novel is the story of a traumatic time in the life of a recently orphaned fourteen-year-old boy named Ponyboy Curtis. He lives on the East Side, a member of the lower class and a gang of "greasers." Quiet and dreamy, Ponyboy has conflicts with his older brother and guardian, Darrel, who keeps the family together. The greasers—whom Ponyboy distinguishes from "hoods"—are the heroes of the tale. Set against them are the upper-class socials, or Socs, who enjoy drinking, driving nice cars, and beating up greasers. The circumstances of this social situation result in the death of three teens. The story explores the themes of class conflict, affection, brotherly love, and coming of age in a way that young people readily appreciate. This novel's portrayal of disaffected youth has been criticized for its violent content, but it is now regarded as a classic of juvenile literature. It can be considered one of the first examples of the "young adult" genre, and after its publication literature for teens gained a new realism, depth, and respect for its audience. [From enotes.com]

**Questions:**

1. In the 60's in Tulsa there were Greasers and Socs. Does your school have similar social groups? What are they called today and how are they similar? How are they different?
2. When thinking about gangs in school, are the Greasers and the Hoods different or similar? How and why?
3. Cherry loved Bob and helped Ponyboy's group. What do you think of her? Why? Would you do the same thing? Why?
4. Darry was raising Ponyboy and Sodapop because their parents were dead. Do you think this is right? Would the boys have been better off in foster care? Why?
5. Was it too much for Darry? Would he have gone to college if he did not have to care for Ponyboy?
6. Sodapop has quit school. What does this mean for his future? Why do you think he did it?
7. Should Johnny be punished for Bob's death when it was in self-defense? Why?
8. Were Johnny, Ponyboy and Dallas heroes of the fire incident even though the fire was probably started by one of their cigarettes? Why?
9. Randy is tired of fighting at the end. Could he have done things differently?

10. Dallas pulls a toy gun on the police in the end. Why? Do you think that Dallas could have lived a happy life without Johnny? Why?

11. Do you think Ponyboy will be okay in the end? Why? What do you think his future will hold?

[From brighthub.com]