# **The Outsiders - Notes**

Created by KylomaskGamer

**Part 1 – Notes of All chapters**

**Part 2 – Important quotes**

**Part 3 – Important Questions**

**Part 4 – Characters**

**Part 5 – Full summary**

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**Summary: Chapter 1**

[Ponyboy Curtis](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/ponyboy-curtis/), the narrator, begins the novel with a story: he is walking home one afternoon after watching a Paul Newman film, and his mind starts to wander. He thinks about how he wants Paul Newman’s good looks, though he likes his own greaser look. He also thinks that, although he likes to watch movies alone, he wishes he had company for the walk home.

Ponyboy steps back from his story to explain that walking alone is unsafe for greasers, the East Side gang of friends to which he belongs. When they walk by themselves, greasers attract the harassment of Socials, or Socs, the rich West Side crowd. Ponyboy says that greasers are poorer and wilder than the Socs, whom the newspapers condemn one day for throwing parties and praise the next day for good citizenship. Greasers wear their hair long and put grease in it. They dress tough, steal, and get into gang fights. They often carry switchblades, mainly to help them stand their ground against the Socs.

Ponyboy says he does not participate in typical greaser mischief because his oldest brother, [Darrel](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/darry-curtis/) (known as “Darry”), would kill him if he got into trouble. Ponyboy’s parents died in a car crash, so the three Curtis brothers live together by themselves, an arrangement possible only as long as they stay out of trouble. Twenty-year-old Darry acts as head of the family. He is strict with Ponyboy and often yells at him. Despite his intelligence, Ponyboy lacks common sense, which frustrates Darry. Ponyboy feels great affection for his sixteen-year-old brother, [Sodapop](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/sodapop-curtis/), whose charm and cheerfulness he admires.

Ponyboy returns to the story of his solitary walk after the movies. As he walks, he notices a red Corvair trailing him. He quickens his pace as he remembers how badly the Socs beat his friend [Johnny Cade](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/johnny-cade/). The Corvair pulls up beside Ponyboy and five Socs climb out and surround him. One of them asks, “Need a haircut, greaser?” and pulls out a blade. The Socs begin to beat up Ponyboy, who screams for help. Ponyboy’s brothers and the rest of their group appear on the scene and chase away the Socs. Darry starts to scold Ponyboy for walking home alone instead of calling for a ride, but Sodapop tells him to stop nagging.

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

At home, Ponyboy, who loves to read, reads *Great Expectations* and thinks about how his life resembles the life of Pip, the main character in *Great Expectations.* Still shaken by his fight with the Socs, Ponyboy climbs into bed with Sodapop. The brothers talk about Sodapop’s girlfriend, Sandy, whom Sodapop hopes to marry one day.

**Summary: Chapter 2**

The next night, Ponyboy and Johnny go with Dally to a double feature at the drive-in movie theater. They sit behind a pair of Soc girls, and Dally begins to talk dirty to embarrass the girls. The girl with red hair turns around and coolly tells him to stop, but Dally continues to make suggestive remarks. He goes to buy Cokes, and Ponyboy talks to the red-haired girl, [Cherry Valance](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/cherry-valance/). They talk about the rodeo and about Sodapop, whom Cherry describes as a “doll.” She asks what became of Sodapop, and although the admission embarrasses him, Ponyboy says that Sodapop dropped out of school to work in a gas station. Dally comes back and offers a Coke to Cherry, but she throws it in his face. Dally tries to put his arm around her. When he will not listen to Cherry’s protests, the usually quiet Johnny stuns Dally by telling him not to bother the girls.

Dally stalks off, and Cherry and her friend Marcia invite Ponyboy and Johnny to watch the movie with them. Two-Bit, one of Ponyboy’s friends, comes to announce that Dally has slashed Tim Shepard’s tires and is going to have to fight 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.

Cherry and Ponyboy go to get popcorn, and Ponyboy tells her about the time the Socs beat up Johnny. The leader of the gang that beat him, Ponyboy says, wore a fistful of rings. Cherry looks distressed and assures him that not all Socs are violent like the Socs that beat Johnny. She also tells him that Socs have problems just as the greasers do, but Ponyboy does not believe her.

### **Summary: Chapter 3**

[Ponyboy](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/ponyboy-curtis/), Two-Bit, and [Johnny](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/johnny-cade/) walk to Two-Bit’s house with [Cherry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/cherry-valance/) and Marcia so that they can give the girls a ride home. As they walk, Ponyboy and Cherry talk about Ponyboy’s brothers. He notices how easy it is to talk to Cherry. When Cherry asks Ponyboy to describe [Darry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/darry-curtis/), he says Darry does not like him and probably wishes he could put Ponyboy in a home somewhere. Johnny and Two-Bit are startled to hear that Ponyboy feels this way, and Johnny says he always thought the three brothers got along well.

After Ponyboy tells Cherry about [Sodapop](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/sodapop-curtis/)’s old horse, Mickey Mouse, the two move on to discuss the differences they perceive between Socs and greasers. During this discussion, Ponyboy and Cherry find they have a surprising amount in common—for instance, they both like reading and watching sunsets. Ponyboy voices his frustration that the greasers have terrible luck while the Socs lead comfortable lives and jump the greasers out of sheer boredom. Cherry retorts that the Socs’ situations are not as simple as Ponyboy thinks. They decide that the main difference between Socs and greasers is that Socs are too cool and aloof to acknowledge their emotions and that they live their lives trying to fill up their emotional void, while the greasers feel everything too intensely. Ponyboy realizes that, although they come from different classes, he and Cherry watch the same sunset.

A blue Mustang cruises by the group. The Mustang belongs to Bob and Randy, Cherry’s and Marcia’s Soc boyfriends. The Mustang pulls up beside the group, and Randy and Bob get out. Ponyboy notices that Bob wears three heavy rings on his hand. The greasers and Socs nearly get into a fight, but the girls agree to leave with their boyfriends to prevent violence. Before leaving, Cherry tells Ponyboy that she hopes she won’t see Dally again, because she thinks she could fall in love with him.

Ponyboy walks home and finds Darry furious with him for staying out so late. In the ensuing argument, Darry slaps Ponyboy. No one in Ponyboy’s family has ever hit him before, and Ponyboy storms out of the house in a rage. He feels sure now that Darry does not want him around. It is after two o’clock in the morning. Ponyboy finds Johnny in the lot where the greasers hang out, and he tells Johnny that they are running away. Johnny, who lives with his abusive alcoholic father, agrees to run away without hesitating. The boys decide to walk through the park and determine whether they really want to leave.

### **Summary: Chapter 4**

The park is deserted at 2:30 in the morning. Ponyboy and Johnny go walking beside the fountain. It is cold out, and Ponyboy is wearing only a short-sleeved shirt. Suddenly the boys see the blue Mustang from earlier that night. Five Socs, including Randy and Bob, jump out of the car and approach them. Presumably, the Socs have come to get even with the boys for picking up their girlfriends. Ponyboy can tell they are drunk. Bob tells Ponyboy that greasers are white trash with long hair, and Ponyboy retorts that Socs are nothing but white trash with Mustangs and madras shirts. In a rage, Ponyboy spits at the Socs. A Soc grabs Ponyboy and holds his head under the frigid water of the fountain. Ponyboy feels himself drowning and blacks out. When he regains consciousness, the Socs have run away. He is lying on the pavement next to Johnny. Bob’s bloody corpse is nearby. Johnny says, “I killed him,” and Ponyboy sees Johnny’s switchblade, dark to the hilt with blood.

Ponyboy panics, but Johnny remains calm. They decide to go to Dally, thinking he might be able to help them. They find Dally at the house of Buck Merril, his rodeo partner. He manages to get the boys fifty dollars, a change of clothing for Ponyboy, and a loaded gun. He instructs them to take a train to Windrixville, where they can hide in an abandoned church. Ponyboy and Johnny get on a train, and Ponyboy goes to sleep. When they get to Windrixville, they hop off the train and find the church, where they collapse into exhausted sleep.

### **Summary: Chapter 5**

The next morning, [Ponyboy](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/ponyboy-curtis/) wakes in the church and finds a note from [Johnny](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/johnny-cade/) saying that he has gone into town to get supplies. When Johnny returns, he brings a week’s supply of baloney and cigarettes, and a paperback copy of *Gone with the Wind,* which he wants Ponyboy to read to him. Ponyboy makes a wisecrack and Johnny tells him he is becoming more like Two-Bit every day. Johnny insists that they cut their hair to disguise themselves, and he bleaches Ponyboy’s hair.

For the next week, the boys hide out at the church, reading *Gone with the Wind,* smoking, and eating sandwiches. The boys admire the southern gentlemen in *Gone with the Wind,* and Johnny points out that they remind him of Dally. Ponyboy disagrees. He prefers the other greasers to Dally. Most of the greasers remind Ponyboy of the heroes in novels, but Dally is so real he is frightening. Later, Ponyboy recites a Robert Frost poem, “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” Johnny is moved by the poem.

After about five days, Dally shows up at the church with a letter to Ponyboy from [Sodapop](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/sodapop-curtis/). Dally says the police approached him about Bob’s murder and he told them that the perpetrators fled to Texas. He takes Johnny and Ponyboy to the Dairy Queen and tells them that a state of open warfare exists between the greasers and the Socs, who are furious about Bob’s death. He also lets slip that [Cherry Valance](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/cherry-valance/), feeling responsible for the murderous encounter, has been acting as a spy for the greasers. He adds that in a day’s time the two groups will meet for a rumble.

### **Summary: Chapter 6**

Johnny shocks Dally by telling him he wants to go back home and confess to his crime. Dally tries to change Johnny’s mind, telling him he never wants to see Johnny hardened the way prison would harden him. Johnny is adamant and points out that his own parents would not care what happens to him, but Ponyboy’s brothers care about him and want to see him. Swearing under his breath, Dally begins to drive Johnny and Ponyboy home. As they drive past the church where Ponyboy and Johnny have been staying, they see that it is on fire. Ponyboy thinks he and Johnny must have started the fire with a cigarette butt, so the boys jump out of the car to examine the blaze.

At the church, they find a group of schoolchildren on a picnic. Suddenly, one of the adult chaperones cries out that some of the children are missing, and Ponyboy hears screaming from inside the church. Acting on instinct, he and Johnny climb into the burning building through a window. At the back of the church, they find the children huddled together and terrified. As he runs through the smoky inferno, Ponyboy wonders why he is not scared. He and Johnny lift the children out of the window. Dally appears and yells that the roof is about to cave in. As they lift the last child out the window, the roof crumbles. Johnny pushes Ponyboy out of the window, and then Ponyboy hears Johnny scream. Ponyboy starts to go back in for Johnny, but Dally clubs him across the back and knocks him out.

When Ponyboy wakes, he is in an ambulance, accompanied by one of the schoolteachers, Jerry Wood. The teacher tells him that his back caught on fire and that the jacket he was wearing, which Dally lent him, saved his life. He says that Dally was burned but will probably be fine. Johnny, however, is in very bad shape—he was struck by a piece of burning timber as it fell, and may have broken his back. The man jokingly asks Ponyboy if he and Johnny are professional heroes. Ponyboy tells him that they are juvenile delinquents.

Ponyboy has suffered mild burns. Jerry stays with him while he is in the hospital, and Ponyboy confides the story of Bob’s death. Jerry agrees that Johnny killed Bob in self-defense. He tells Ponyboy he shouldn’t smoke, something that no one has ever said to Ponyboy before. [Darry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/darry-curtis/) and Sodapop arrive. Sodapop hugs Ponyboy, and Darry cries, shocking Ponyboy. The anger he has felt toward Darry dissolves. Ponyboy realizes that Darry does care about him; Darry is strict because he loves Ponyboy and wants him to succeed. Ponyboy runs across the room and embraces his brother, thinking that everything will be fine once he gets home.

### **Summary: Chapter 7**

The reporters and police interview [Ponyboy](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/ponyboy-curtis/), [Sodapop](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/sodapop-curtis/), and [Darry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/darry-curtis/) in the hospital waiting room. Sodapop jokes with the reporters and hospital staff, keeping the mood light with his antics. The doctors finally emerge and say that Dally will be fine but that [Johnny](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/johnny-cade/)’s back was broken when the roof caved in. Even if Johnny survives, they add, he will be permanently crippled.

The next morning, Ponyboy is making breakfast when Steve Randle (Sodapop’s best friend) and Two-Bit come in with the morning papers. The papers portray Ponyboy, Johnny, and Dally as heroes for rescuing the schoolchildren. They also mention Ponyboy’s excellent performance on the track team and in school. The papers mention that the state will charge Johnny with manslaughter and send both Ponyboy and Johnny to juvenile court, from which Ponyboy might be sent to a boys’ home. The other boys reassure Ponyboy that his family will stay together. Ponyboy tells them he had his recurring nightmare—which first occurred on the night of his parents’ funeral—the previous night. He never remembers the dream, but it makes him wake up in intense panic.

Ponyboy asks Sodapop about Sandy and learns that she got pregnant and moved to Florida. Her parents refused to let her marry Sodapop because of his age, so Sandy left to live with her grandmother. Sodapop and Darry go to work, and Two-Bit and Ponyboy go to get Cokes at the Tasty Freeze. A blue Mustang pulls up to the restaurant, and in it they see the group of Socs that jumped Ponyboy and Johnny in the park. Ponyboy feels an immediate and intense hatred for them.

One of the Socs, Marcia’s boyfriend, Randy, comes over to Ponyboy. Two-Bit reminds him that no fighting is allowed before the rumble, but Randy says he wants only to talk. He asks Ponyboy why he saved those children and says he would never have thought a greaser could do such a thing. Ponyboy says that it didn’t have anything to do with his being a greaser. Sick about the violence and Bob’s death, Randy says he does not intend to fight at the rumble. Randy explains that Bob was his best friend, a good guy with a terrible temper and overly indulgent parents. Ponyboy feels reassured by his talk with Randy and realizes that Socs can be human and vulnerable.

### **Summary: Chapter 8**

Two-Bit and [Ponyboy](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/ponyboy-curtis/) go to see [Johnny](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/johnny-cade/) and Dally in the hospital. Johnny, weak and pale, whispers that he would like Ponyboy to finish reading *Gone with the Wind* to him. His mother shows up to visit, but she is a mean-spirited, nagging woman and Johnny refuses to see her. As Ponyboy and Two-Bit leave, she accosts them and blames them for Johnny’s condition, and Two-Bit insults her.

Dally is recovering nicely in the hospital, and for the first time ever Ponyboy feels warmly toward Dally. Dally says that Tim Shepard, the leader of another gang of greasers, came in to talk about the rumble. Dally asks for Two-Bit’s black-handled switchblade, and Two-Bit gladly hands over his prized possession without even asking why Dally needs it.

On the way home, Ponyboy and Two-Bit see [Cherry Valance](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/cherry-valance/) in her Corvette. She says that the Socs have agreed to fight with no weapons. Ponyboy asks her to go see Johnny, but she says she cannot because Johnny killed Bob. She says that Bob had a sweet side and was only violent when drunk, as he was when he beat up Johnny. Ponyboy calls her a traitor, but he quickly forgives her. He asks her if she can see the sunset on the West Side, and when she says she can, he tells her to remember that he can see it on the East Side too.

### **Summary: Chapter 9**

Feeling sick before the rumble, [Ponyboy](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/ponyboy-curtis/) swallows five aspirin and struggles to eat his dinner. The boys have bathed and made themselves look “tuff,” and leave for the rumble excitedly. Ponyboy feels a sinking feeling when he sees the other greasers. Tim Shepard’s gang and the others seem like genuine hoods. Twenty-two Socs arrive in four carloads to fight the twenty greasers. [Darry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/darry-curtis/) steps forward to start the fight, and Paul Holden, Darry’s high school friend and football teammate, steps up to challenge him. As Paul and Darry circle each other, Dally joins the group. As Dally arrives, the fight breaks out in full. After a long struggle, the greasers win.

When the rumble ends, Dally and Ponyboy go to the hospital to see [Johnny](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/johnny-cade/). A policeman stops them, but Ponyboy feigns an injury, and the officer gives them an escort to the hospital. Ponyboy and Dally find Johnny dying. Johnny moans that fighting is useless, tells Ponyboy to “[s]tay gold,” and then dies. Dally is beside himself with grief and runs frantically from the room.

### **Summary: Chapter 10**

After Johnny’s death, Ponyboy wanders alone for hours until a man offers him a ride. The man asks Ponyboy if he is okay and tells him that his head is bleeding. Ponyboy feels vaguely disoriented. At home, he finds the greasers gathered in the living room and tells them that Johnny is dead and that Dally has broken down. Dally calls and says he just robbed a grocery store and is running from the police. The gang rushes out and sees police officers chasing him. Dally pulls out the unloaded gun he carries, and the police shoot him. Dally collapses to the ground, dead. Ponyboy muses that Dally wanted to die. Feeling dizzy and overwhelmed, Ponyboy passes out.

When Ponyboy wakes, Darry is at his side. Ponyboy learns that he got a concussion when a Soc kicked him in the head during the rumble, and that he has been delirious in bed for three days.

### **Summary: Chapter 11**

[Ponyboy](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/ponyboy-curtis/) is restricted to bed rest for a week after he wakes up from his concussion. He finds a picture of Bob the Soc in [Sodapop](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/sodapop-curtis/)’s high school yearbook. Bob’s grin reminds him of Sodapop’s. Ponyboy wonders if Bob’s parents hate him, saying he prefers their hatred to their pity. Looking at the photograph and remembering conversations with [Cherry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/cherry-valance/) and Randy, Ponyboy concludes that Bob was cocky, hot-tempered, frightened, and human.

Randy arrives at the house to talk to Ponyboy and behaves with shocking insensitivity. Not thinking of what Ponyboy has suffered, Randy says he is worried about being associated with the violence. They discuss the hearing scheduled for the next day. Ponyboy, in a delirious state, says that he killed Bob himself and that [Johnny](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/johnny-cade/) is still alive. [Darry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/darry-curtis/) asks Randy to leave.

### **Summary: Chapter 12**

Ponyboy does not have to speak much at the hearing, since his doctor has spoken to the judge about Ponyboy’s condition. The judge asks Ponyboy a few gentle questions about his home life and then acquits him of all wrongdoing and allows him to return home with his brothers. After the hearing, Ponyboy becomes detached and depressed. His grades suffer, he loses his coordination, memory, and appetite, and he resumes fighting with Darry. Ponyboy’s English teacher, Mr. Syme, says that although Ponyboy is failing, he can raise his grade to a C by writing an outstanding autobiographical theme.

The next day at lunch, Ponyboy goes to the grocery store with Steve and Two-Bit for candy bars and Cokes. When a group of Socs accosts him, he threatens them with a broken bottle, saying he refuses to take any more of their intimidation. Ponyboy’s uncharacteristic show of hostility alarms Steve and Two-Bit, and they warn Ponyboy not to grow hard like Dally was. They are relieved when Ponyboy bends down to pick up the broken glass, not wanting anyone to get a flat tire.

That night as Ponyboy and Darry fight about Ponyboy’s grades, Sodapop runs out of the house, upset that Sandy has returned a letter he wrote her unopened. Darry explains that Sodapop is not the father of Sandy’s child and acts puzzled that Sodapop never told Ponyboy. Ponyboy reflects that he probably acted uninterested when Sodapop tried to talk about his problems. Worried, Darry and Ponyboy go find Sodapop. He tells them their constant fighting is tearing him apart. Sobbing, he asks them to try to understand each other and stop fighting. They promise to try. Ponyboy thinks that Sodapop will hold them together.

The boys run back home. Ponyboy looks at Johnny’s copy of *Gone with the Wind.* He finds a handwritten note from Johnny urging him to stay gold and saying that the children’s lives were worth his own. Ponyboy realizes that he wants to tell the story of his friends so that other hoodlums will not nurse their anger at the world and ignore the beauty in it. He begins to work on his English theme, starting with the words that begin *The Outsiders*: “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.”

# **Quotes**

## **Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold.**

As he lies dying in Chapter 9, Johnny Cade speaks these words to Ponyboy. “Stay gold” is a reference to the Robert Frost poem that Ponyboy recites to Johnny when the two hide out in the Windrixville Church. One line in the poem reads, “Nothing gold can stay,” meaning that all good things must come to an end. By the end of the novel, the boys apply this idea to youthful innocence, believing that they cannot remain forever unsullied by the harsh realities of life. Here, Johnny urges Ponyboy to remain gold, or innocent. Johnny now senses the uselessness of fighting; he knows that Ponyboy is better than the average hoodlum, and he wants Ponyboy to hold onto the golden qualities that set him apart from his companions.

The quotation also recalls the period of time during which the boys’ friendship blossoms and solidifies—the idyllic interlude at the church. During this blissful time, the two boys read, talk, and smoke, escaping the adult world of responsibility. Like the gold of the poem, however, this idyll is tinged with sadness. Just as the gold in the poem vanishes, the idyll must end, and the boys must face the consequences of the murder.

## **It’s okay… We aren’t in the same class. Just don’t forget that some of us watch the sunset too.**

Ponyboy speaks these words to Cherry Valance in Chapter 3 after he, Two-Bit, and Johnny spend time with Cherry and Marcia at the drive-in. Ponyboy points out that the sunset closes the gap between the greasers and Socs. He realizes that, even though the two groups have unequal lifestyles, attitudes, and financial situations, they nevertheless live in the same world, beneath the same sun. The words “some of us watch the sunset” suggest to Cherry that although some of the greasers live up to the stereotype of greasers as rough and unrefined, some of them, like Ponyboy, have a keen appreciation for beauty—as keen as that of the richest socialite. By agreeing on the basic fact that rich and poor people look at the same sun, Ponyboy and Cherry take a small step toward a potential reconciliation between the rival gangs. This moment of concord comes early in the narrative, and its idealistic tone makes the rifts and violence to come all the more painful.

## **Dally was so real he scared me.**

Ponyboy speaks these words in Chapter 5, during his stay with Johnny in the abandoned church in Windrixville. Pony’s realization stems from a comment Johnny makes after reading a passage from Gone with the Wind, in which he says that Dally reminds him of one of the gallant Southern gentlemen from the Civil War. The fact that Dally is too “real” for Ponyboy reveals something about his narrative perspective. He says earlier that the other greasers—Soda, Darry, and Two-Bit—remind him more of the heroes in his books than Dally does. Ponyboy feels more comfortable with Soda, Darry, and Two-Bit because as a narrator, and later a writer, he is more comfortable with fictional heroes than with real people like Dally who have lost their innocence.

Johnny, on the other hand, though quieter and more timid than Ponyboy, finds it in himself to admire Dally and to look past his intimidating exterior. Dally does not scare him but rather fascinates him, and he holds a romanticized vision of Dally as an honorable Southern gentleman. By comparing Dally to a character in a book, Johnny becomes able to understand him. In a sense, Ponyboy’s and Johnny’s comments about Dally reveal that Ponyboy is even more vulnerable than Johnny.

## **Greasers will still be greasers and Socs will still be Socs. Sometimes I think it’s the ones in the middle that are really the lucky stiffs.**

Randy delivers these lines in Chapter 7 when he tells Ponyboy that he will not be fighting in the rumble. His words speak to an important idea in the novel—the futility of the recurring Soc-greaser violence. The idea Randy presents here has another side to it, however. By stating that the members of both groups will always remain in their respective groups, he suggests that it would be impossible for a greaser or a Soc to rise above his current status. He appears to believe that, despite their youth, the young men in the story will never be able to move on and transcend the narrow limits of their gang identities.

Randy’s belief in the permanence of their social identities may be based, however, in the fact that he is a Soc and not a greaser. Having grown up in a wealthy and comfortable environment, it would not be difficult for him to imagine himself forever stuck in this lifestyle. A greaser, on the other hand, might have different ideas about social mobility. A poor youth from the East Side like Ponyboy would be more likely to imagine shedding the greaser lifestyle to pursue higher goals and improve his social status.

## **We couldn’t get along without him. We needed Johnny as much as he needed the gang. And for the same reason.**

This quotation comes from Chapter 8. As Ponyboy sits in the hospital and watches Johnny dying, he muses on the fragility of group cohesion. It seems obvious that Johnny needs the greasers—he is small, passive, and poor, which makes him an easy target of Soc violence. Less obvious is the gang’s need for Johnny. The greasers need a vulnerable friend to give them a sense of purpose. Telling themselves that they exist to protect people like Johnny lets them avoid thinking about the fact that their poverty and vulnerability leave them no choice but to band together. Ponyboy comes to this conclusion at the end of the novel, as Johnny is dying. He understands Johnny’s value only when he is about to lose Johnny, which amplifies the pain of the loss.

# **Common Questions**

## **How does Dally die?**

The policemen kill Dally. After Johnny dies in the hospital, Dally is so upset, he runs away from Ponyboy and robs a grocery store. The police chase him to the empty lot where the greasers hang out. There, Dally takes out his unloaded gun and threatens the police, who shoot him in self-defense. Dally dies with a “look of grim triumph on his face,” and Ponyboy realizes that Dally “wanted to be dead and he always got what he wanted.”

## **What do Johnny’s last words mean?**

Right before he dies in the hospital, Johnny says “Stay gold, Ponyboy.” Ponyboy cannot figure out what Johnny means until he reads the note Johnny left. Johnny writes that “stay gold” is a reference to the Robert Frost poem Ponyboy shared when they were hiding at the church. Johnny claims that Frost meant “you’re gold when you’re a kid...When you’re a kid, everything’s new, dawn.” Johnny writes that Ponyboy’s love of sunsets is “gold.” He wants Ponyboy to protect his childhood innocence and nurture his ability to experience wonder.

## **Why is Sodapop upset about Sandy?**

Sandy, Sodapop’s girlfriend, gets pregnant and moves to Florida with her grandmother. Sodapop writes to her, but his letters return unopened. Darry tells Ponyboy that the baby isn’t Sodapop’s, and that Sandy “didn’t love him like he thought she did.” This conversation triggers Ponyboy’s realization that his fun-loving brother has problems of his own, and that when Sodapop tries to share about his life, he finds Ponyboy inattentive and “daydreaming or stuck in a book.”

## **What is the court’s decision on Bob’s murder?**

The judge acquits Ponyboy of the charges against him for his involvement in Bob’s murder, and closes the entire case. Despite their fears, the judge does not send Ponyboy and Sodapop to a “boy’s home,” and allows them to continue living under Darry’s guardianship. Despite this positive outcome, Ponyboy struggles to return to his normal routine, becoming absent-minded and failing his classes.

## **Why do Cherry and Ponyboy talk about sunsets?**

When they first meet, Ponyboy tells Cherry that even though they aren’t members of the same social class, she should not forget that “some of us watch the sunset too.” Ponyboy is embarrassed when Cherry admits she doesn’t want to be seen with greasers, so he seeks to prove that he too has an appreciation for beauty, despite his social status. Later in the novel, Ponyboy and Cherry discuss sunsets again, agreeing that their beauty can be seen from both the West Side, where the Socs live, and the East Side, where greasers live.

# **Characters**

## **Ponyboy Curtis**

Ponyboy Curtis, the youngest member of the greasers, narrates the novel. Ponyboy theorizes on the motivations and personalities of his friends and describes events in a slang-y, youthful voice. Though only fourteen years old, he understands the way his social group functions and the role each group member plays. He sees that Two-Bit is the wisecracker, Darry the natural leader, and Dally the dangerous thug.

Ponyboy dislikes the Socs, whom we see through his subjective viewpoint. The distorting effects of hatred and group rivalry make his narration less than objective. Ponyboy is young enough to have changeable conceptions of people, however, and over the course of the novel he realizes that Socs have problems just as greasers do. He also comes to see that Socs are even similar to the greasers in some ways.

Ponyboy has a literary bent, which Hinton uses to show that poverty does not necessarily mean boorishness or lack of culture, and that gang members are not always delinquents. Ponyboy identifies with Pip, the impoverished protagonist of Charles Dickens’s [*Great Expectations*](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/greatex/)*,* cites the Robert Frost poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” and introduces Johnny to the southern gentlemen of Margaret Mitchell’s Southern epic, [*Gone with the Wind*](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/gonewith/)*.* With such an awareness of literary protagonists, Ponyboy sees himself as he is, as both character and narrator. He takes on the narrator’s work of recounting events and the character’s work of growing and changing as a result of those events. The novel is not just a story of gang rivalry; it is an account of Ponyboy’s development.

## **Johnny Cade**

Johnny Cade is a vulnerable sixteen-year-old greaser in a group defined by toughness and a sense of invincibility. He comes from an abusive home, and he takes to the greasers because they are his only reliable family. While Johnny needs the greasers, the greasers also need Johnny: protecting him gives them a sense of purpose and justifies their violent measures. When Johnny suffers at the hands of the Socs, the greasers feel vindicated in their hatred of the rival gang.

Passive and quiet, Johnny is the principal catalyst for the major events of the novel. He stands up to Dally at the drive-in and tells him to stop harassing the two Soc girls, Cherry and Marcia. Johnny’s intervention on the girls’ behalf pleases the girls, and they talk and walk with the greasers. This interaction between female Socs and male greasers sparks the anger of the Soc boys and motivates them to attack Johnny and Ponyboy. Ultimately, Johnny’s small acts of courage lead to murder, death, and heroic rescue. But Johnny ends by advocating against gang violence, stating that he would gladly sacrifice his life for the lives of little children.

Although a gentle boy, he has a profound impact with his startling, persistent demand for peace. His courage in rescuing the children from the burning church and his subsequent death as a result of injuries sustained in the rescue make him a martyr. Ponyboy’s decision to write the story that becomes *The Outsiders* ensures that Johnny’s bravery will not be forgotten.

## **Cherry Valance**

Before Cherry Valance enters the narrative, Ponyboy paints the conflict between the greasers and the Socs as irreconcilable. The introduction of Cherry, however, suggests that individual friendships can chip away at group hatreds. Cherry gets along perfectly well with some of the greasers. She likes Ponyboy and Johnny because they treat her politely. Dally’s rude antics do not amuse her. Her disenchantment with Dally’s behavior suggests that she talks to Ponyboy and Johnny not because she is slumming and their greaser identity fascinates her, but rather because she likes them as individuals. For a short while at least, she cares more about how each boy behaves than about his West Side or East Side address.

Cherry is not just a sweet, simple girl. She finds herself attracted to Dally, who is crass and unrefined but also sexy and charismatic. Despite all her attraction to the greasers, moreover, she is not completely free of group prejudice. She tells Ponyboy that she probably won't say hello to him at school, acknowledging that she respects social divisions. Although Cherry plays a relatively small role in the novel, the ambiguity of her sympathies gives us something to which we can relate. She mirrors our own perspective as someone close to the action who is nevertheless an outsider and who does not always fully understand other characters’ emotions and motivations.

## **Sodapop Curtis**

Sodapop, sometimes called “Soda,” is the middle of the three Curtis brothers. He is energetic, disinterested in school, and movie-star handsome. Ponyboy describes his idolization of Sodapop from the very beginning, and says his brother “gets drunk on just plain living,” a quality he deeply admires. In contrast to his distant and tense relationship with Darry, Ponyboy’s relationship with Sodapop is one of admiration and trust. Both boys share a bed, and Sodapop serves as a symbolic security blanket for Ponyboy, especially since their parents’ deaths.

Sodapop’s happy-go-lucky personality easily masks his inner turmoil. After finding out that Sodapop is upset because his letters to Sandy went unanswered, Ponyboy realizes that he “never had paid much attention to Soda’s problems.” At the end of the novel, Sodapop is the character who finally unites the Curtis family, after he breaks down in tears over his brothers’ constant fighting. He reminds Darry and Ponyboy that they “ought to be able to stick together against everything” since they’re all they have left family-wise. The brothers agree to stop fighting so that they can stay together. Because of Sodapop, Ponyboy is able to look more favorably upon Darry, and realize how much his oldest brother has sacrificed for their family.

## **Darry Curtis**

Darry is the oldest of the Curtis brothers, becoming the father figure to Ponyboy and Sodapop after their parents die in a car accident. Darry gives up the possibility of going to college and playing football so that he can take a job as a menial laborer and provide for their family. Despite his hard-working nature and ability to differentiate right from wrong, Darry also loves fighting, and is proud to use his strong body to defend the other greasers.

Ponyboy finds it difficult to understand Darry, who often seems too harsh and restrictive. When Darry slaps Ponyboy during an argument, Ponyboy runs outside to walk with Johnny, where they are jumped by Socs and Johnny kills Bob. Inadvertently, Darry’s authoritative tendencies incite the murder that derails every other character’s life. Over the course of the novel, however, Ponyboy comes to understand how much Darry has sacrificed for him, and how worried he is that Ponyboy and Sodapop will be removed from his guardianship. By novel’s end, Ponyboy realizes that Darry isn’t even a full-grown adult yet, and he can “feel scared or hurt and as lost as the rest of us.”

## **Dallas "Dally" Winston**

Dally Winston is one of the older members of the Greasers and by far the most hardened and violent, to the extent that Ponyboy admits to feeling uncomfortable around him. Dally joins the Greasers after growing up in New York City, where he experienced incredibly harsh conditions due to living in abject poverty. However, throughout *The Outsiders*, the depths of Dally’s personality are uncovered, revealing a vulnerable and tragic character. He shares brief details of his abusive childhood, admitting that his father doesn’t care whether he lives or dies. He shows special care for one of the gang’s younger members, Johnny, a sweet kid whom Ponyboy describes as sensitive. Through Dally’s relationship with Johnny, to whom he acts as a stand-in older brother, Dally reveals a good heart underneath his mean exterior. He sees Johnny as a younger version of himself, uncorrupted by crime and potentially still able to escape poverty for a better life. It becomes clear that Dally fears Johnny facing the same severe consequences that he has, telling him “I just don’t want you to get hurt.”

Dally shows his strong sense of loyalty by helping and protecting Johnny and Ponyboy as much as he can, including running into the burning church to save both boys. But Johnny’s death is the last straw for Dally, whose life has been filled with too much pain, abuse, and tragedy for him to handle. Dally found purpose through caring for Johnny, and Johnny’s passing destroys any meaning he still finds in life. Dally robs a grocery store, attracting the police, and ultimately dies via suicide-by-cop. Unable to envision a better path for himself, Dally ends his suffering through violence, the only constant in his life. Ultimately, Dally represents the tragic consequences of an uncaring society abandoning vulnerable children in abusive, violent situations. If Dally had been given the empathy, care, and resources he deserved, he might have had a chance to escape the trauma of his upbringing.

# **Full summary**

[Ponyboy Curtis](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/ponyboy-curtis/) belongs to a lower-class group of Oklahoma youths who call themselves greasers because of their greasy long hair. Walking home from a movie, Ponyboy is attacked by a group of Socs, the greasers’ rivals, who are upper-class youths from the West Side of town. The Socs, short for Socials, gang up on Ponyboy and threaten to slit his throat. A group of greasers comes and chases the bullies away, saving Ponyboy. Ponyboy’s rescuers include his brother [Sodapop](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/sodapop-curtis/), a charming, handsome high-school dropout, and [Darry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/darry-curtis/), Ponyboy’s oldest brother (Darry assumed responsibility for his brothers when their parents were killed in a car crash). The rest of the greasers who come to Ponyboy’s rescue are [Johnny Cade](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/johnny-cade/), a sensitive sixteen-year-old; Dally, a hardened street hood with a long criminal record; Steve, Sodapop’s best friend; and Two-Bit, the oldest and funniest group member.

The next night, Ponyboy and Johnny go to a movie with Dally. They sit behind a pair of attractive Soc girls. Dally flirts with the girls obnoxiously. After Johnny tells Dally to stop harassing the Soc girls, Dally walks away. Johnny and Ponyboy sit with the girls, who are named [Cherry](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsiders/character/cherry-valance/) and Marcia, and Ponyboy and Cherry discover that they have a lot in common. Two-Bit arrives, and the three greasers begin to walk the Soc girls to Two-Bit’s house so he can drive them home. On the way to Two-Bit’s house, they run into Bob and Randy, the girls’ drunken boyfriends. The girls must leave with their boyfriends in order to prevent a fight between the Socs and the greasers.

Ponyboy is late getting home, and his brother Darry is furious with him. Sick of Darry’s constant scrutiny and criticism, Ponyboy yells at Darry. The brothers begin to fight, and Darry slaps Ponyboy across the face. Ponyboy flees, determined to run away. He finds Johnny, and the two boys heads for the park. There they encounter Bob and Randy with a group of Soc boys. The Socs attack Johnny and Ponyboy, and one of them holds Ponyboy’s head under the frigid water of a fountain until Ponyboy blacks out. Ponyboy regains consciousness to find himself lying on the ground. He is next to Johnny—and next to Bob’s corpse. Johnny tells Ponyboy that he (Johnny) killed Bob because the Socs were going to drown Ponyboy and beat up Johnny.

Desperate and terrified, Ponyboy and Johnny hurry to find Dally Winston, the one person they think might be able to help them. Dally gives them a gun and some money and sends them to an abandoned church near the neighboring town of Windrixville. They hide out in the church for a week, cutting and dyeing their hair to disguise themselves, reading *Gone with the Wind* aloud, and discussing poetry.

After several days, Dally comes to check on Ponyboy and Johnny. He tells the boys that, since Bob’s death, tensions between the greasers and the Socs have escalated. A rumble is to take place the next night to settle matters. He says that Cherry, who feels partially responsible for Bob’s death, has been acting as a spy for the greasers. Johnny shocks Dally by declaring his intention to go back and turn himself in.

Dally agrees to drive Ponyboy and Johnny back home. However, as the boys leave, they notice that the abandoned church where Ponyboy and Johnny have been staying has caught fire. They discover that a group of schoolchildren has wandered inside. Ponyboy and Johnny rush into the inferno to save the children. Just as they get the last child through the window, the roof caves in, and Ponyboy blacks out. He regains consciousness in an ambulance. At the hospital, he is diagnosed with minor burns and bruises. Dally is not badly hurt either, but Johnny’s back was broken by the falling roof, and he is in critical condition.

Darry and Sodapop come to get Ponyboy, and Darry and Ponyboy make up. The following morning, the newspapers proclaim Ponyboy and Johnny heroes. They also report that, because of Bob’s death, Johnny will be charged with manslaughter. Finally, the papers also state that both Ponyboy and Johnny will have to go to juvenile court so that a judge can decide if they should be sent to a boys’ home.

Ponyboy and Two-Bit go to get a Coke and run into Randy. Randy tells Ponyboy that he is sick of all the fighting and does not plan to go to the rumble that night. When Ponyboy and Two-Bit visit Johnny in the hospital, Johnny seems weak. He asks Ponyboy for a new copy of *Gone with the Wind.* During their visit with Dally, Ponyboy and Two-Bit notice that Dally is much stronger than Johnny. Dally asks to borrow Two-Bit’s black-handled switchblade. On the way home, Two-Bit and Ponyboy see Cherry. She refuses to visit Johnny because he has killed Bob, and Ponyboy calls her a traitor. When she explains herself, he relents.

At the rumble, the greasers defeat the Socs. Dally shows up just in time for the fight; he has escaped from the hospital. After the fight, Ponyboy and Dally hurry back to see Johnny and find that he is dying. When Johnny dies, Dally loses control and runs from the room in a frenzy. Ponyboy stumbles home late that night, feeling dazed and disoriented. He tells the others of Johnny’s death. Dally calls to say that he has robbed a grocery store and the cops are looking for him. The greasers hurry to find him, but they are too late. Dally raises a gun to the police and they gun him down. Overwhelmed, Ponyboy passes out.

Ponyboy wakes up in bed at home. He has suffered a concussion from a kick to the head at the rumble and has been delirious in bed for several days. When he is well, he attends his hearing, where the judge treats him kindly and acquits him of responsibility for Bob’s death. The court rules that Ponyboy will be allowed to remain at home with Darry. For a time, Ponyboy feels listless and empty. His grades slip, he feels hostile to Darry, and he loses his appetite. At last, Sodapop tells Ponyboy that he (Sodapop) is angry and frustrated because of the tension at home. He tearfully asks that Ponyboy and Darry stop fighting.

Finally understanding the value of his family, Ponyboy agrees not to fight with Darry anymore. He finds that for the first time he can remember Dally’s and Johnny’s deaths without pain or denial. He decides to tell their story and begins writing a term paper for his English class, which turns out to be the novel itself.