



# THE OUTSIDERS: DISCUSSION GUIDE #1

Encourage critical thinking and support your students' literacy development by asking questions during reading. Here are some questions you can ask your readers to engage them in a discussion.



## CHAPTERS 1-2

### Comprehension:

- Who are the greasers?

“Greasers” is a name for the gang Ponyboy belongs to on the East Side. They are generally characterized as not having much money. They are known for getting into mischief, dressing tough, getting into fights, stealing, and carrying switchblades. Greasers wear their hair long and put grease in it.

- Who are the Socs?

“Socs” (short for “Socials”) are the teens from the west side of town. They are known for being wealthy and driving fancy cars. They think they are better than the greasers and often fight with them. They throw big parties. Newspapers call them a public disgrace one day and praise them as assets to society the next.

- Who is Ponyboy Curtis?

Ponyboy is the 14-year-old narrator and the main character of the novel. He is a greaser, but, unlike other greasers, he avoids getting into mischief because he knows that his older brother Darry will be angry if he does.

- What happened to Ponyboy’s parents? Who does he live with now?

A car crash killed Ponyboy’s parents, so he lives with his two older brothers, Sodapop and Darry. His oldest brother, Darry, has taken on the guardianship role for his younger brothers.

- Why is it dangerous for Ponyboy to walk alone at night?

Since Ponyboy is a greaser, he is a possible target for attack by the Socs. And indeed, as Ponyboy walks home from the movies, he is attacked by a group of Socs.

- Who is Johnny? What recently happened to him?

Johnny Cade is considered a “pet” of the greasers; he is “everyone’s kid brother” and they all take care of him. He was recently beaten up very badly by the Socs. He is 16 years old but looks much younger, and he comes from an abusive home. Ponyboy notes that Johnny looks like “a little dark puppy that has been kicked too many times and is lost in a crowd of strangers.”

- What does Soda tell Ponyboy about Darry that Ponyboy has a hard time believing?

Sodapop tells Ponyboy that Darry loves him, but Darry is hard on Ponyboy, so Pony doesn’t believe these are Darry’s true feelings. Pony thinks that Darry sees him as “just another mouth to feed and somebody to holler at” and doesn’t love anything or anyone except for Soda.



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## CHAPTERS 1-2

- Why do Cherry and Marcia invite Ponyboy and Johnny to sit with them at the drive-in?  
**Dally was using dirty language when talking to the girls, and Ponyboy and Johnny did not join in, and they told Dally to stop. As a result, Cherry and Marcia ask the boys to sit with them and protect them.**
- What does Cherry tell Ponyboy about the Socs?  
**Cherry wants Ponyboy to know that the Socs are not all like the ones who jumped Johnny. She says the Socs have things rough too.**

### Text Analysis:

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- How is Ponyboy's relationship with his brother Darry different from his relationship with his brother Sodapop?  
**Ponyboy notes his overwhelming love for Sodapop. He says that Soda "understands everything, almost" about him, but Darry yells at him and treats him like a kid. Ponyboy notes that Darry is always angry at him because Ponyboy doesn't think things through before acting. When Soda tells Pony that Darry loves him, Pony doesn't believe it.**
- In Chapter 1, Ponyboy says, "I lie to myself all the time." What does he mean by this?  
**After reflecting that "Darry doesn't love anyone or anything," Ponyboy says that he doesn't care about Darry, but then admits that he lies to himself. Since Ponyboy believes that Darry doesn't care about him, he tries to ignore the pain this causes by lying to himself that he doesn't care about Darry either.**

### Personal Connection:

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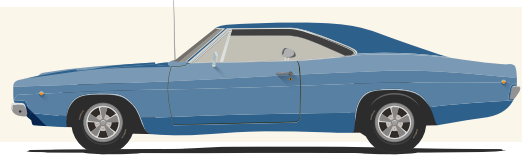
- ◆ Chapters 1 and 2 lay out the underlying and ever-present tension between the greasers and the Socs due to their class differences. What are some social differences or divisions that exist among the teens that you know? What do they have in common with the greasers and/or the Socs?  
**Answers will vary.**



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## CHAPTERS 3-4



### Comprehension:

- According to Cherry, what is the main difference between the greasers and the Socs?

Cherry believes that the main difference between the greasers and the Socs is the way they experience emotions. She thinks that the greasers are overly emotional, whereas the Socs are so cool, sophisticated, and detached, that they barely feel anything at all.

- What happened to Soda's horse?

When Soda worked at a stable, there was a horse kept there named Mickey Mouse. Soda didn't actually own the horse, but in effect, Mickey Mouse was Soda's horse because of the close relationship he had with him. Although the horse was mean to other people and other horses, Soda developed a strong bond with Mickey Mouse. Since Soda couldn't afford to buy him, the horse was eventually sold by his owner.

- Why does Ponyboy want to go live in the country?

Ponyboy fantasizes about living in the country because he thinks his life would be different in a place without gangs, violence, and the troubles he experiences every day living in a town. He imagines what it would be like to live there with his parents still alive and his brother Darry different, since Darry wouldn't have been forced into the role of caretaker.

- What happens that causes Ponyboy to run away?

Ponyboy and Johnny fall asleep in the vacant lot. When Ponyboy wakes up, he races home, but Darry, who has been waiting up for Ponyboy, is angrier than Pony has ever seen him before. Darry hollers at Ponyboy. Sodapop tries to stick up for Ponyboy, but when he does, Darry yells at him too. When Ponyboy tells Darry not to yell at Soda, Darry hits Pony. Although Darry apologizes, Ponyboy is so shocked and hurt that he runs away.

- Who comes looking for Johnny and Pony in the park? Why?

Five Socs find Ponyboy and Johnny in the park. They are angry because the greasers were talking to Cherry and Marcia earlier.

- What do the Socs attempt to do to Ponyboy? Are they successful?

A Soc named David holds Ponyboy's head underwater in the fountain and attempts to drown him, but just as Ponyboy thinks he is going to die, he finds himself coughing up water on the pavement. Johnny tells Ponyboy that he killed another Soc, Bob, with his switchblade in order to save Ponyboy and that the rest of the Socs ran away.

- Who do Pony and Johnny go to for help? How does he help them?

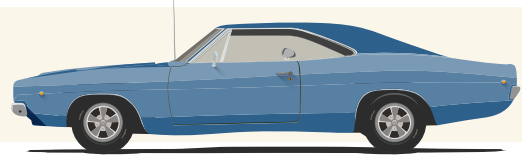
The boys go to Dally who gives them fifty dollars, a loaded gun, a shirt, and a leather jacket. He then directs them to take a freight train to find an abandoned church he knows of for them to hide out in.



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## CHAPTERS 3-4



### Text Analysis:

- What does the story about Mickey Mouse show about Ponyboy's love for Sodapop?

When Sodapop lost Mickey Mouse, he cried himself to sleep. Ponyboy acutely felt Soda's pain. He saved his money for a year, hoping to save enough to buy Mickey Mouse back for Soda, but he was ultimately unsuccessful. This illustrates how much Ponyboy loves his brother.

- **Situational irony** is a term that refers to an unexpected twist or turn of events in a story. In Chapter 4, Ponyboy says "my dreams come true and I'm in the country." Why is this statement ironic?

In Chapter 3, Ponyboy fantasizes about the country as a way to escape his problems. In Chapter 4, he does end up in the country, but under terrible circumstances. His dream of being in the country is at odds with the reality of why he is there.

- Authors use **foreshadowing** to give the reader a hint that something will happen later in the story. *The Outsiders* author S. E. Hinton uses this device frequently in the novel. Earlier in the novel, how did S.E. Hinton foreshadow that Johnny would use his switchblade later?

Ponyboy noted that although Johnny was the most law-abiding greaser, after his beating by the Socs, he now carries a switchblade and would use it to kill the next person that tried to hurt him. This foreshadows Johnny actually using the switchblade to kill Bob later.

- When Ponyboy tells Johnny that Darry hit him, Johnny says "I think I like it better when the old man's hittin' me . . . At least then I know he knows who I am. I walk in that house, and nobody says anything. I walk out, and nobody says anything. I stay away all night, and nobody notices. At least you got Soda. I ain't got nobody." What information about Ponyboy and Johnny is revealed through this conversation?

Ponyboy thinks his troubles at home are bad, but Johnny's are worse. This is highlighted when Ponyboy complains that he does not get along with Darry. Ponyboy immediately realizes that compared to Johnny's home, his own is "heaven," since Darry doesn't get drunk and beat him or run him out of the house.

Johnny's words highlight the difference between Johnny's home life and Ponyboy's. Darry actually cares for Ponyboy, but Johnny's mock appreciation for his father's beatings emphasizes the harsh difference between Pony's and Johnny's home lives.

### Personal Connection:

- ◆ Do you think the advice Dally gives Ponyboy and Johnny is sound? Why or why not? What might you have told them to do if they had come to you in this situation?

Answers will vary.