



THE OUTSIDERS: DISCUSSION GUIDE #2

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 5-6

Comprehension:

- How and why do Ponyboy and Johnny disguise themselves?
Johnny convinces Ponyboy that it is necessary to disguise their appearances so that they won't be recognized. He and Ponyboy cut each other's hair, and Johnny uses peroxide to bleach Ponyboy's dark hair to make it lighter.
- Johnny compares Dally to the Southern gentlemen from *Gone with the Wind*. How does he believe Dally is similar to the gentlemen?
Johnny explains that Dally has a type of courage and gallantry that makes him similar to the Southern gentlemen. He tells Ponyboy that when Dally was picked up by the police for breaking windows in the school, Dally remained cool and calm and took the sentence, even though it was Two-Bit who committed the crime. He makes the connection between Dally's actions and the Southern gentlemen who bravely died in the Civil War. Johnny admires Dally's bravery and loyalty and thinks that it makes him gallant like the Southern gentlemen.
- What surprising news does Dally tell Johnny and Ponyboy about Cherry?
Dally tells Ponyboy and Johnny that Cherry feels partially responsible for the stabbing incident and has been acting as a spy for the greasers.
- What event is planned as a result of Bob's death?
After Johnny kills Bob, tensions between the Socs and greasers are high. As a result, the Socs and the greasers are planning to have a rumble.
- What does Johnny tell Ponyboy and Dally he wants to do that surprises them? What reasons does he give for this?
Johnny reveals that he has been thinking about turning himself in to the police. Ponyboy and Dally are surprised, but Johnny thinks that it is a good idea because he doesn't have a criminal record and he killed Bob in self-defense. He thinks it is likely that he won't be in as much trouble as if he was one of the more seasoned greasers. He also feels bad that Ponyboy is on the run with him, even though he didn't kill anyone.
- How do Ponyboy and Johnny become heroes?
As Dally is driving the boys back home, they pass the church and see that it's on fire. Upon learning that several children are trapped inside, Ponyboy and Johnny heroically enter the church and rescue the children from the burning building by passing them out the window.
- What do Darry's tears finally make Ponyboy understand about Darry?
When Darry arrives at the hospital and sees Ponyboy, he cries, relieved that Ponyboy is alive. Ponyboy sees Darry's tears and realizes that Darry loves him intensely. He wonders how he could have ever thought of Darry as cold and unfeeling.



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CHAPTERS 5-6

Text Analysis:

- When Bob threatens to cut Ponyboy's hair, Ponyboy is alarmed and resists forcefully. He is also extremely upset when Johnny cuts and bleaches his hair to keep him safe. Why do you think Ponyboy's hair is so important to him?

The greasers' long hair is part of their identity, and Ponyboy calls it their "trademark" and "the one thing we were proud of." The greasers can't afford fancy cars or expensive clothes, which are trademarks of the Socs, but they are proud of their trademark long hair and it makes them feel special. Ponyboy's hair is important to him because it symbolizes that he is a part of the greaser gang. When he and Johnny later cut their hair, it introduces a distinction between the identities of Ponyboy and Johnny, the two innocent spirits of the gang, and the rest of the greasers.

- A **metaphor** is a figure of speech used to describe something in a way that is not literally true, but the comparison helps us understand the idea. In Chapter 6, Ponyboy says, "I had taken the long way around, but I was finally home. To stay." What does this metaphor mean?

It has taken Ponyboy a long time to understand Darry and realize that his oldest brother loves him intensely. At the beginning of the novel, Ponyboy is certain that Darry hates him, even though both Sodapop and Two-Bit tell him differently. However, when Darry cries thinking he has lost another member of his family, Ponyboy realizes how much Darry cares about him and how much he has given up for Ponyboy. The metaphor is used to show that Ponyboy realizes that it has taken him longer than it should have for him to understand the depth of Darry's love for him but that he understands it now.

- 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. How do Johnny's parents react to his running away and how did Hinton foreshadow that this would be their reaction earlier in the story?
In previous chapters, Ponyboy has alluded to Johnny's abusive home life, and Johnny has noted that his parents never pay any attention to him. So, the reader is not surprised when Dally tells Johnny that his parents haven't asked about him since he's been gone. Johnny's parents' lack of concern for him when he runs away was foreshadowed by the earlier descriptions of their neglect.

Personal Connection:

- ◆ Johnny surprises Ponyboy with his deep understanding of the poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay." Based on the boys' interpretation of the poem, what are some things that you would consider "gold"? Explain your answer.

Answers will vary.



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CHAPTERS 7-8

Comprehension:

- How do the boys get information about Johnny's condition after the fire? What do they learn?

The boys tell the doctor that they are the only family that Johnny has in order to learn that Johnny is in critical condition. He has a broken back and third-degree burns covering most of his body. He is in a state of severe shock.

- What does the newspaper say about Ponyboy and Johnny? What does Ponyboy learn from reading the article?

The newspaper headline proclaims, "Juvenile Delinquents Turn Heroes." The article paints Ponyboy and Johnny in a positive light, including quotes from Cherry and Randy explaining that, during the stabbing incident, the Socs were drunk and the greasers fought back in self-defense. It also describes how the boys risked their lives in order to save the children from the burning church. Pony learns that he will need to go to juvenile court and the Curtis boys may be removed from Darry's guardianship and go to a boys' home.

- Why does Darry always leave the front door of the Curtis home unlocked?

The Curtis home is always left unlocked because it is a safe place for all of the greasers to stay if they need a place to sleep or hide out from trouble. Ponyboy notes that he never knows who he's going to find in their house because their friends come and go as they please.

- According to Randy, what caused Bob to behave the way he did?

Bob's best friend, Randy, tells Ponyboy that Bob was spoiled. Bob's parents gave him too many things and never forbade him from doing anything. Randy thinks that Bob's behavior became increasingly bad because he hoped that it would get his parents' attention and make them try and stop him from acting like that; Bob really wanted his parents to tell him "no" because limits give a person "something solid to stand on." Without limits, Bob became cruel just for the sake of feeling some kind of emotion.

- What happens when Johnny's mother arrives at the hospital?

When Johnny's mother shows up at the hospital, Johnny refuses to see her. He is still hurt and angry that she didn't care enough about him to ask about him when he ran away. He thinks that she only wants to tell him how much trouble he is creating for her. Afterwards, Johnny turns pale and passes out. Ponyboy sees Johnny's mother in the hall when he goes to visit Dally. She blames Ponyboy and Two-Bit for Johnny's situation, and Ponyboy is relieved that she can't visit Johnny because he thinks it might kill Johnny to see her.

- Why does Ponyboy believe that Cherry is a traitor?

Cherry tells Ponyboy that she can't bring herself to see Johnny because he killed Bob. Even though she understands Johnny's actions, she still can't bring herself to go see him because Bob was her boyfriend and she loved him. As a result, Ponyboy calls her a traitor.



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CHAPTERS 7-8

Text Analysis:

- What qualities does Cherry admire both in Bob and in Dally? How are the boys similar? Use evidence from the story to support your answer.

Although Bob was Cherry's boyfriend, she notes earlier in the novel that she could see herself falling in love with Dally as well. This is because, in spite of their outward differences, Dally and Bob have similarities. They both exhibit a quick temper and a tendency toward violence. Both lack parental involvement and discipline in their lives. Dally says that his father doesn't care about him ("Shoot, my old man don't give a hang whether I'm in jail or dead in a car wreck or drunk in the gutter") and Bob's parents didn't set boundaries or give him the kind of attention that he needed. ("He kept trying to make someone say 'No' and they never did. They never did. That was what he wanted. For somebody to tell him 'No.' To have somebody lay down the law, set the limits, give him something solid to stand on"). Both could also be caring, as it seems that Bob cared for Cherry and Dally cares for Johnny.

- Ponyboy says "We needed Johnny as much as he needed the gang. And for the same reason." What does Ponyboy mean? Why do the greasers need Johnny? Why does Johnny need the gang?

Johnny's home life is described as both abusive and neglectful. Johnny needs the gang because they are the only real family he has. The greasers provide the role of family and bring a sense of stability to Johnny's life. Prior to the novel's beginning, Johnny was beaten badly by the Socs. In the aftermath of this event, the gang focuses on protecting Johnny from future violence initiated by the Socs. Protecting Johnny gives the greasers a purpose and justifies their behavior toward the Socs.

- How does Ponyboy's conversation with Randy change his perspective on the Socs and the feud between the two gangs?

Before his conversation with Randy, Ponyboy sees the Socs in black and white terms. He simply sees them as enemies. However, his conversation with Randy makes him realize that they are human beings with problems, just like the greasers are human beings with problems. Their social classes are different, and fighting won't change that. Even if the greasers "win" the rumble, they will still lose in terms of their social standing because "Greasers will still be greasers and Socs will still be Socs."

Personal Connection:

- ◆ In Chapter 8, Ponyboy muses that if Darry didn't have the gang and his brothers to raise, he would be a Soc. In this way, Ponyboy acknowledges how much Darry has given up for his siblings and the greasers. Do you think this sacrifice (choosing to raise his brothers and support the gang at the expense of his personal goals, such as college) was the right choice for Darry? Explain. What would you do if you were in Darry's situation?

Answers will vary.