



THE OUTSIDERS: DISCUSSION GUIDE #3

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 9-10

Comprehension:

- How does Ponyboy feel before the rumble?

Ponyboy feels sick and has a headache. Since he is hiding his illness from the others, he takes five aspirin to try to feel better.

- There are different greaser gangs that fight together in the rumble. How is Tim Sheppard's gang different from Ponyboy's gang?

Although they are all greasers, Ponyboy thinks that Tim Sheppard's gang are all just hoods, but his own gang consists of a group of friends that care about and defend each other. The greasers that follow Tim Sheppard are more of a traditional "gang." They have an official leader (Tim) and the others follow him, unlike Ponyboy's gang, which has no leader and is built on the bonds of friendship.

- Who is Paul Holden? What is the connection between him and Darry?

Paul was one of Darry's good friends in high school. They were once football teammates, but now they are enemies because Darry is a greaser and Paul is a Soc.

- Which group wins the rumble?

The greasers win because the Socs run away. Since the Socs run away from the fight first, the greasers automatically become the winners of the rumble.

- What are the effects of the injury Ponyboy suffers in the rumble?

Ponyboy's head is bleeding, and he gets a concussion from being kicked in the head by one of the Socs. As a result, after he finally returns home and tells the greasers about Johnny's death, he passes out and spends the next three days unconscious and delirious.

- What happens after Dally learns about Johnny's death?

Dally calls and says he just robbed a grocery store and is running from the police. The greasers rush out to the lot to help Dally hide, but they get there at the same time as the police officers. Dally pulls out the unloaded gun he carries, and the police, who don't know it is unloaded, shoot him.



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CHAPTERS 9-10

Text Analysis:

- Ponyboy understands that in his neighborhood, “young hoods. . . would grow up to be old hoods.” However, he doesn’t think this will happen to him and Darry. Why doesn’t Ponyboy see himself as a “hood”? Why is Ponyboy certain that neither he nor Darry will become hoods?

Before the fight, Ponyboy thinks about the differences between his gang and the other greaser gangs, which are made up of “hoods.” Greasers are kids who fight, but hoods are future and/or ex-convicts. Ponyboy’s intelligence, sensitivity, and general distaste for violence keep him from being a hood. He is sure that Darry, who is a hard worker, will eventually “get somewhere.” Ponyboy thinks that Darry’s determination makes him better than the rest of the greasers, and he is determined to be like Darry and escape living in “a lousy neighborhood all [his] life.”

- A **theme** is a universal message explored throughout a work of literature. How does the fight between Darry and Paul Holden help to explore the theme of hostility between different social classes?

Darry and Paul used to be good friends and teammates on their high school football team. However, now that Darry has to work and Paul is a college student, they are enemies for no other reason than they belong to different social classes, and each boy is obligated to defend his gang against the other’s. The fight between Darry and Paul as former friends highlights the pointlessness of the fight between the greasers and the Socs. They fight out of responsibility rather than true hatred.

- An **allusion** is an implied or indirect reference, especially in literature. Johnny’s last words to Ponyboy are an allusion. What does he say, and what does he mean by this allusion?

Before he dies, Johnny tells Ponyboy to “Stay gold.” This is an allusion to the poem “Nothing Gold Can Stay,” which Ponyboy shared with Johnny in Chapter 5. This is Johnny’s way of telling Ponyboy that he still has a good and pure heart and that he needs to work hard to keep that quality, because it makes him different from the other greasers. Johnny understands that it is difficult to retain your innate goodness when you spend all your time with others who have lost their “gold.”

Personal Connection:

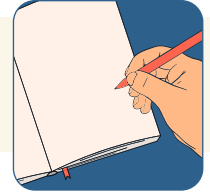
- ◆ Ponyboy doesn’t really like fighting and only thinks it’s okay in cases of self-defense, but he feels obligated to participate in the rumble anyway. Can you think of a situation in a movie, TV show, or real life where someone didn’t want to do something but did it anyway because they felt like they had to in order to be a good friend? Explain.

Answers will vary.



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CHAPTERS 11-12

Comprehension:

- What does Ponyboy do to pass the time while he recovers?

Ponyboy spends a week in bed recovering. To pass the time, he looks through Sodapop's old yearbooks. He sees a picture of Robert Sheldon and realizes that it is Bob, the Soc whom Johnny killed. He wonders what Bob was like and how his parents are handling his death.

- What happens to Ponyboy's life as a result of his concussion and recent trauma?

Ponyboy starts having trouble with his memory and becomes easily distracted. He has been through so much that he finds it difficult to concentrate in school. As Ponyboy's schoolwork starts to suffer, it causes him and Darry to fight more often.

- In Chapter 12, Ponyboy learns the real reason that Sandy went to Florida. Why did she go, and what does this explain about Sodapop's recent behavior?

After Soda gets upset and runs out of the house, Darry tells Ponyboy that the real reason that Sandy left is that she is pregnant and the baby isn't Sodapop's. This explains why Sodapop has been so upset; he loved Sandy more than she loved him. When Ponyboy learns about this, he feels guilty, because he realizes that he hasn't been paying attention to Sodapop or his feelings lately.

- Why do Darry and Ponyboy promise not to fight anymore?

After Ponyboy and Darry manage to catch Sodapop in the park, Soda explains that he ran away because "it's like I'm the middleman in a tug o' war and I'm being split in half." Ponyboy and Darry realize that Soda feels as if he is constantly being forced to choose sides between them and that he hates being in that position. Neither Pony nor Darry understood the terrible effect their constant fighting had on Soda, so they vow to stop fighting for his sake.

- When Ponyboy opens his copy of *Gone With The Wind*, a note falls out. What does the note say?

Before he died, Johnny had written a note to Ponyboy telling him that he doesn't mind dying because saving the kids from the burning church was worth it. Johnny says that he understands the meaning of the poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay" and wants Dally to understand it too. Johnny asks Ponyboy to tell Dally to look at a sunset and remind him that there's still lots of good in the world. However, by the time Ponyboy reads the note, Dally is already dead, so Ponyboy doesn't get to tell him this.

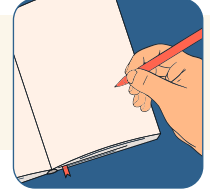
- What opportunity does Ponyboy's teacher give him to save his failing grade?

Ponyboy's teacher notices that Ponyboy, who is normally a good student, has been struggling with his schoolwork as he tries to come to grips with all that has happened: the aftermath of Bob's murder, the deaths of Johnny and Dally, his own concussion, and the near loss of his family. His teacher offers him a chance to pass the class by earning extra credit by writing a five-page theme on a topic of his choosing.



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CHAPTERS 11-12

Text Analysis:

- What is meaningful about the last sentence of the novel?

The last sentence of the novel, "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," is the first sentence of Ponyboy's extra credit writing assignment, which also happens to be the first sentence of the novel. This indicates that Ponyboy has written the book as his theme for his English class. Although Ponyboy struggled to come up with a topic, he decides to write about his life experiences to honor the lives of Johnny and Dally, and *The Outsiders* is the result.

- After threatening the Socs with a broken bottle, Ponyboy picks up the pieces of glass in the street. Why does he do this? What is unusual about this behavior? Why is Two-Bit so relieved when Ponyboy does this?

When Ponyboy breaks the bottle and threatens the Socs, it shows that he has become hardened and tough. Two-Bit is worried because he doesn't want Ponyboy to lose his sensitive nature. However, shortly after the Socs leave, Ponyboy unexpectedly begins picking up the pieces of glass from the street because he is worried about someone getting a flat tire. This is unusual because most people who broke a bottle to cut someone with it would be unconcerned about the glass left behind in the street. By picking up the glass fragments, Ponyboy reveals that his innate goodness has remained, even after the pain he's had to endure. Two-Bit notices this and is relieved to see that Ponyboy hasn't become completely hardened.

- When Randy comes to visit Ponyboy while he recovers, Ponyboy tells him, "I had the knife. I killed Bob," and "Johnny is not dead." Why does Ponyboy say this, and what effect does it create?

These statements show that there are genuine problems with Ponyboy's mental state. In Chapter 10, Ponyboy asserts that Johnny "isn't dead. And this time my dreaming worked," which sets up Ponyboy's state of denial in Chapter 11. The reader knows that Johnny killed Bob, so Ponyboy's assertion that he committed the crime himself shows that the events have pushed Pony's mind beyond the breaking point. Ponyboy does not want to admit to himself that Johnny is dead or feel the pain associated with the loss, so he lies to himself to avoid having to process those emotions.

Personal Connection:

- ◆ Ponyboy acknowledges that his English teacher cares about him and seems genuinely interested in him as a person. Have you ever felt this way about any of the teachers, coaches, or other adults who fill similar roles in your life? How did it affect your relationship with them? Did their interest in you make you want to work harder for them?

Answers will vary.