

Name:

If you ANNOTATE, complete the following several times throughout the text:

- Summarize main ideas and label them MI, then underline their supporting details.
- Circle words you do not know or key words (the most important words for this article's topic) and use context clues to define them
- Connect it to the unit we are studying using evidence from the text



AoW6: "After 50 years, 'Outsiders' continues to 'stay gold' "

Standard-Examiner

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Sometimes the most monumental moments in our lives are completely unexpected; they just seem to happen without any warning or explanation. Nevertheless, these are the times we are most thankful for and will always remember. I went through, and am still recuperating from, one of these times last December when I read S.E. Hinton's "The Outsiders" for the very first time.



Although it was controversial when published in 1967, S.E. Hinton's novel has taken a prominent spot in the world of literature. It has won the Margaret Edwards Award, become part of the curriculum for middle and/or high school English classes, and was even adapted into a major motion picture in 1983, featuring Hollywood icons Patrick Swayze, Tom Cruise, Rob Lowe, Ralph Macchio and C. Thomas Howell.

S. E. Hinton, only 17 years old when the novel was published, wrote "The Outsiders" after her friend told her of walking home from school and getting beat up for being a greaser (a member of a gang from the west side of the tracks, with a reputation of being rude and filthy). Hinton said that she merely wrote the fiction to let off some steam and never dared dream what it would turn into.

The story, though taking place over little more than a week, covers much of Ponyboy Curtis' life with his two older brothers, Darry and Sodapop, and his fellow gang members Johnny, Two-Bit, Steve and Dally. Being only 14 years old, you wouldn't expect Ponyboy to feel the way he does, see the things he has, or think about life in a way that messes with your own perspective.

Through all of the hardships and pressures to be just like any other "hood," Ponyboy remains sensitive, quiet and compassionate. He loves movies (especially ones starring Paul Newman), reading "Gone With the Wind" with his best pal Johnny, and watching the sun set each night. Doesn't sound like a juvenile delinquent, right? Yet society marks him as lousy, causing traumatic experiences and with little hope for his future.

While I greatly treasure “The Outsiders” and am ecstatic that this year is its 50th anniversary, many of my peers question why I even like this book. “Why is this so important to you?” they ask, and, “Isn’t that book about gangs?”

Yes, this book is about gangs, but not really. At one time I, too, was actually afraid to read “The Outsiders” since I thought its plot was based around gang fights and violence. My older sister continued to push me to read the book, however, and thank goodness she did. When I eventually read the novel, it soon became one of my favorite books, accompanying me wherever I go, and teaching me something new each time I read it.

It turns out that while there may be mentions of rumbles and switchblades, “The Outsiders” actually promotes how gang violence ruins lives and causes unnecessary deaths, as well as mental stress and disorders. It focuses on the importance of true friendship, the pain one suffers after loss, the terrible consequences of society’s prejudice, and resilience. It causes you to think more deeply about the choices you make, the people you’re around, and the ways communities inevitably try to label you.

Society continues to misjudge people all across the world today through gossip, characterizing, and, above all else, fear of anything that is different. One of the most influential moments in “The Outsiders” is when Ponyboy and Johnny are watching the sunrise together. Johnny says he wishes the sky could stay like that all the time, always looking perfect and beautiful. Ponyboy replies by quoting Robert Frost’s poem, “Nothing Gold Can Stay.” He says he always remembered the poem because he never knew what Frost meant by it. Later in the novel, Johnny conveys that the poet meant that when you’re a kid, everything is new, gold. He continues to say that it’s when you get older that you lose your sense of tolerance, understanding and open-mindedness; that “gold” time in your life is gone.

Why this novel is so meaningful, why it continues to impact people’s lives although being 50 years old, is simply because it reminds each of us that we’re all a kid from somewhere, whether it be the streets of New York, a family too distracted to notice someone craving attention, or a crummy house in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

We are all people, born with individual personalities and in different situations and economies. That is why being the person he wants to be, and not the person he is expected to be, is so hard, yet so important, to Ponyboy Curtis.

I don’t love “The Outsiders” merely because it is an award-winning novel and features good-looking guys in the ’60s; that’s just a pleasant bonus! I truly love it because it tells why we need to be the person others may not be aware we are. The person who loves his brothers more than anything and isn’t afraid to show it. The person who runs into a burning church to save children he doesn’t even know. The person who sits beside Johnny Cade at the vacant lot, just to gaze up at the stars.

“Stay gold, Ponyboy. Stay gold ...”