

READ:

The Outsiders was written by a teenager about teenagers. The author, Susan Eloise Hinton, began writing the story when she was 15-years-old and it was finally published when she was 17-years-old, in 1967. She was advised to use a pen name, S.E. Hinton, because the publisher did not think that people would believe that a girl wrote this novel! Hinton began writing the story in response to an act of teenage violence that occurred in her hometown. The setting of the novel, Oklahoma in the 1960s, is the same setting in which Hinton wrote the book. Considered a coming-of-age novel, The Outsiders examines many social and teenage issues that were prevalent in the 1960s and are still issues today.

Discussion Questions:

What do you think “The Outsiders” means? What is an “outsider”?

What do you think a “coming-of-age” novel means?

What do you think were some of the issues teenagers faced in the 1960s?

Do you think these are issues that teenagers still face today?

Letter from S.E. Hinton

READ:

Dear Reader,

It is very difficult for me to write about myself, and especially The Outsiders, which was written at a horrendous time in my life, was published by a series of mind-boggling synchronicities, and has gone further than any author dared dream. But I'll give it a shot.

I wrote The Outsiders when I was sixteen years old. Actually I began it when I was fifteen, as a short story about a boy who was beaten up on his way home from the movies.

But I didn't just write The Outsiders, I lived it. Looking back, I realize how important it was to me to have another life at that time. To be someone else. To deal with the problems I had to face, and write my way to some sort of understanding and coping. This is all in hindsight. At the time, I was mad about the social situation in my high school. I desperately wanted something to read that dealt realistically with teen-age life.

I knew I was going to be a writer. I love to write. I began in grade school, because I loved to read, and liked the idea of making stories happen the way I wanted them to. By the time I was in high school I had been practicing for years. So I was both elated and not surprised when I received my publishing contract on the day I graduated from high school.

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Fans. I receive letters from every state, from dozens of foreign countries. From twelve-year-olds and forty-year-olds. From convicts and policemen, teachers, social workers, and of course, kids. Kids who are living like those in The Outsiders. Kids who can't imagine living lives like those in The Outsiders. Kids who read all the time. Ones who never before finished a book.

The letters saying “I loved the book” are good, the ones that say “I never liked to read before, and now I read all them” are better, but the ones that say “The Outsiders changed my life” and “I read it fifteen years ago and I realize how much it has influenced my life choices” frankly scare me. Who am I to change anyone’s life? I guess the best reply is “It’s the book, not the author” and “It’s the message, not the messenger.” A lot of the time I feel that The Outsiders was meant to be written, and I was chosen to write it. It’s certainly done more good than anything I could accomplish on a personal level.

If this sounds like I am overwhelmed by the decades of incredible response to what began as a short story I started when I was fifteen years old, well, I guess that’s the truth.

Stay Gold.

S.E. Hinton

Discussion Questions:

What kinds of characters do you think you will encounter while reading The Outsiders?

What kinds of themes do you think you will encounter while reading The Outsiders?

What do you think the author wants you to take away from this novel?