


# The Outsiders: Plot Overview

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Ponyboy Curtis belongs to a lower-class group of Oklahoma youths who call themselves greasers because of their greasy long hair. Walking home from a movie, Ponyboy is attacked by a group of Socs, the greasers' rivals, who are upper-class youths from the West Side of town. The Socs, short for Socials, gang up on Ponyboy and threaten to slit his throat. A group of greasers comes and chases the bullies away, saving Ponyboy. Ponyboy's rescuers include his brother Sodapop, a charming, handsome high-school dropout, and Darry, Ponyboy's oldest brother (Darry assumed responsibility for his brothers when their parents were killed in a car crash). The rest of the greasers who come to Ponyboy's rescue are Johnny, a sensitive sixteen-year-old; Dally, a hardened street hood with a long criminal record; Steve, Sodapop's best friend; and Two-Bit, the oldest and funniest group member.

The next night, Ponyboy and Johnny go to a movie with Dally. They sit behind a pair of attractive Soc girls. Dally flirts with the girls obnoxiously. After Johnny tells Dally to stop harassing the Soc girls, Dally walks away. Johnny and Ponyboy sit with the girls, who are named Cherry and Marcia, and Ponyboy and Cherry discover that they have a lot in common. Two-Bit arrives, and the three greasers begin to walk the Soc girls to Two-Bit's house so he can drive them home. On the way to Two-Bit's house, they run into Bob and Randy, the girls' drunken boyfriends. The girls must leave with their boyfriends in order to prevent a fight between the Socs and the greasers.

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**Video SparkNotes: Charles Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities summary**

Ponyboy is late getting home, and his brother Darry is furious with him. Sick of Darry's constant scrutiny and criticism, Ponyboy yells at Darry. The brothers begin to fight, and Darry slaps Ponyboy across the face. Ponyboy flees, determined to run away. He finds Johnny, and the two boys head for the park. There they encounter Bob and Randy with a group of Soc boys. The Socs attack Johnny and Ponyboy, and one of them holds Ponyboy's head under the frigid water of a fountain until Ponyboy blacks out. Ponyboy regains consciousness to find himself lying on the ground. He is next to Johnny—and next to Bob's corpse. Johnny tells Ponyboy that he (Johnny) killed Bob because the Socs were going to drown Ponyboy and beat up Johnny.

Desperate and terrified, Ponyboy and Johnny hurry to find Dally Winston, the one person they think might be able to help them. Dally gives them a gun and some money and sends them to an abandoned church near the neighboring town of Windrixville. They hide out in the church for a week, cutting and dyeing their hair to disguise themselves, reading *Gone with the Wind* aloud, and discussing poetry. After several days, Dally comes to check on Ponyboy and Johnny. He tells the boys that, since Bob's death, tensions between the greasers and the Socs have escalated. A rumble is to take place the next night to settle matters. He says that Cherry, who feels partially responsible for Bob's death, has been acting as a spy for the greasers. Johnny shocks Dally by declaring his intention to go back and turn himself in.

Dally agrees to drive Ponyboy and Johnny back home. However, as the boys leave, they notice that the abandoned church where Ponyboy and Johnny have been staying has caught fire. They discover that a group of schoolchildren has wandered inside. Ponyboy and Johnny rush into the inferno to save the children. Just as they get the last child through the window, the roof caves in, and Ponyboy blacks out. He regains consciousness in an ambulance. At the hospital, he is diagnosed with minor burns and bruises. Dally is not badly hurt either, but Johnny's back was broken by the falling roof, and he is in critical condition. Darry and Sodapop come to get Ponyboy, and Darry and Ponyboy make up. The following morning, the

newspapers proclaim Ponyboy and Johnny heroes. They also report that, because of Bob's death, Johnny will be charged with manslaughter. Finally, the papers also state that both Ponyboy and Johnny will have to go to juvenile court so that a judge can decide if they should be sent to a boys' home.

Ponyboy and Two-Bit go to get a Coke and run into Randy. Randy tells Ponyboy that he is sick of all the fighting and does not plan to go to the rumble that night. When Ponyboy and Two-Bit visit Johnny in the hospital, Johnny seems weak. He asks Ponyboy for a new copy of *Gone with the Wind*. During their visit with Dally, Ponyboy and Two-Bit notice that Dally is much stronger than Johnny. Dally asks to borrow Two-Bit's black-handled switchblade. On the way home, Two-Bit and Ponyboy see Cherry. She refuses to visit Johnny because he has killed Bob, and Ponyboy calls her a traitor. When she explains herself, he relents.

At the rumble, the greasers defeat the Socs. Dally shows up just in time for the fight; he has escaped from the hospital. After the fight, Ponyboy and Dally hurry back to see Johnny and find that he is dying. When Johnny dies, Dally loses control and runs from the room in a frenzy. Ponyboy stumbles home late that night, feeling dazed and disoriented. He tells the others of Johnny's death. Dally calls to say that he has robbed a grocery store and the cops are looking for him. The greasers hurry to find him, but they are too late. Dally raises a gun to the police and they gun him down. Overwhelmed, Ponyboy passes out.

Ponyboy wakes up in bed at home. He has suffered a concussion from a kick to the head at the rumble and has been delirious in bed for several days. When he is well, he attends his hearing, where the judge treats him kindly and acquits him of responsibility for Bob's death. The court rules that Ponyboy will be allowed to remain at home with Darry. For a time, Ponyboy feels listless and empty. His grades slip, he feels hostile to Darry, and he loses his appetite. At last, Sodapop tells Ponyboy that he (Sodapop) is angry and frustrated because of the tension at home. He tearfully asks that Ponyboy and Darry stop fighting. Finally understanding the value of his family, Ponyboy agrees not to fight with Darry

anymore. He finds that for the first time he can remember Dally's and Johnny's deaths without pain or denial. He decides to tell their story and begins writing a term paper for his English class, which turns out to be the novel itself.

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