

A Greaser's Life

The Outsiders begins as Ponyboy Curtis, the 14-year-old narrator of the story, is walking home from a movie theater. He is attacked by several members of the Socs, a gang of wealthy boys who often harass the poorer kids in the area. Ponyboy's brothers and friends come to his rescue—they are all members of their own gang of "greasers"—kids from the rougher side of town.

Ponyboy is shaken by the attack and receives some minor injuries, but is otherwise okay. However, readers soon learn that his life has grown more difficult in other ways too. Both of Ponyboy's parents died recently in an automobile accident, and Darry, the oldest of the three Curtis boys, is left to care for his two younger brothers.

The night after the attack, Ponyboy and two other greasers—Johnny and Dally—sneak into a drive-in theater where they strike up a conversation with a Soc girl named Cherry Valance, who is there with her friend Marcy. Dally is rude to the girls and leaves, but Ponyboy and Johnny decide to stay. Soon Two-Bit, another greaser, joins them. As the boys walk the girls home, the Socs show up and try to start a fight, but Cherry stops them.

Ponyboy gets home late that night, which worries and annoys his brother Darry. After an argument, Darry hits Ponyboy, who then runs off into the night. He finds Johnny, and the two of them decide to hang out in a park. Soon, though, they are joined by the Socs, and a vicious fight begins. Johnny kills Bob, one of the Socs, to save Ponyboy's life, and the rest of the Socs flee. The two greasers turn to Dally for help, who gives them a gun and some money, and tells them where to hide out—an old, abandoned church in the country.

Ponyboy and Johnny stay at the church for a week. They cut their hair and try to change their appearance so they won't be recognized. Then Dally shows up and drives them into town to eat. He tells them that the police think they've run away to Texas. He also mentions that Cherry Valance has testified that Bob was drunk when she saw him just before the fight and was most likely killed by Johnny in self-defense. Based on this news, Johnny decides to turn himself in.

When the three greasers arrive back at the church, they find it on fire! People who have gathered around the burning building tell Ponyboy and his friends that a group of schoolchildren are trapped inside. Ponyboy and Johnny rush into the church to save the kids while Dally hangs back. After helping all of the children escape from the fire, Ponyboy and Johnny are taken to a hospital to be treated for burns. Ponyboy recovers quickly, but Johnny's injuries are much more serious. Ponyboy's brothers show up, as do police officers and newspaper reporters. Ponyboy and Johnny are soon hailed as heroes.

When Johnny dies from his injuries, Dally is overcome with grief. He seems to go a little crazy, robbing a grocery store and running from the police. As the greasers watch helplessly, the police chase Dally into an empty lot. Dally pulls something from his waistband, and the officers shoot him, thinking he's pulling a gun. Traumatized by the deaths of his closest friend—Johnny—and a kid he looked up to—Dally, Ponyboy decides to try living a different kind of life.
