

The Outsiders

Introduction to the novel

Drugs figure prominently in S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, a novel about friendship and belonging in the early 1960s. Alcohol, tobacco and caffeinated drinks are mentioned dozens of times, sometimes playing a pivotal role in the plotline, other times offering insight into the daily lives and world views of various characters. Members of both the underprivileged Greasers and over-privileged Socs use drugs, though each character's relationship with drugs is unique. Different substances are used—or not used—for different reasons and in different ways.

The Outsiders is ideal for helping Grade 8 students develop drug literacy. The story exposes young readers to a wealth of factors related to why people use drugs, and helps them identify and explore some of the potential benefits and consequences of our drug-related choices.

Instructional strategies

1. *The Outsiders* is a gritty, realistic portrayal of teenage life written by a teenaged woman. Hinton has stated that she wrote *The Outsiders* because it was the kind of story that she wanted to read. Tired of books filled with clichés and obligatory happy endings, she longed to write stories about real people with real problems. Have students write their own mini-story about “real people with real problems.” Encourage them to include insights into why the problems exist and how characters respond to these issues.
2. Hinton started a trend, which became a battleground for readers, parents, teachers and librarians. Debate raged over whether *The Outsiders* and the books that followed in its footsteps were too realistic for their own good. These books portrayed issues such as alcohol and other drug use, teen pregnancy, death and divorce. Parents, educators and critics of realism worried that they could encourage bad behaviour in their readers. Discuss.

Curricular competencies

- Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking.
- Think critically, creatively and reflectively to explore ideas within, between and beyond texts.
- Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking.
- Recognize and identify the role of personal, social and cultural contexts, values and perspectives in texts.
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text and world.
- Respond to text in personal, creative and critical ways.
- Use writing and design processes to plan, develop and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Drug literacy objectives

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and well-being of individuals, communities and societies.
- Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs.
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs.