Literary Text: The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton

Organizational Patterns:
The Outsiders is divided into 12 chapters, which are each about 15 pages long. The narrator of the novel is a teenage boy, so the style mirrors how a teenager might act and think. The Outsiders has relatively little description and a lot of dialogue.

Theme:
The themes of The Outsiders are the most important parts of the novel, and the reasons it has stayed popular among adults and teenagers for over fifty years. The main themes include:

1. Friendship- This theme is explored throughout the book through the relationships of Ponyboy and the other greasers, and specifically with his relationship with his brothers and Johnny. “You take up for your buddies no matter what they do. When you’re a gang, you stick up for the members. If you don’t stick up for them, stick together, make like brothers, it isn’t a gang anymore” (p. 26).

2. What is heroism? Where does it come from and how is it displayed? Ponyboy grapples with these questions throughout the novel, but especially when Johnny and Dally die, in opposite circumstances, and Ponyboy tries to sort out the reasons in his mind. “Nobody would write editorial praising Dally. Two friends of mine had died that night: one a hero, the other a hoodlum… Dally didn’t die a hero. He died violent and young and desperate… But Johnny was right. He died gallant” (p. 154).

3. Prejudice/Stereotypes- This theme is apparent through the fights between the greasers and the Socs. The conflict is based solely on the fact that one side is rich and the other is poor, with no other reason to hate but this. Ponyboy often thinks about these issues and wonders if the two sides are more similar than most realize.

Setting:
The setting of The Outsiders is in a large city in Oklahoma in the 1950s or 60s. While Johnny and Ponyboy are hiding outside of town, it also takes place in the country. The setting is essential to the story.

Foreshadowing:
Foreshadowing occurs several times in The Outsiders. The most notable are the following:
1. When Ponyboy is describing Johnny at the beginning of the novel and says, “And Johnny, who was the most law-abiding of us, now carried in his back pocket a six-inch switchblade. He’d use it, too, if he ever got jumped again. They had scared him that much. He would kill the person who jumped him” (p. 34), foreshadowing what later happens with the Socs.

2. When Ponyboy and Johnny are hiding in the church Ponybody foreshadows, “if that old church ever caught fire, there’d be no stopping it” (p. 79). This foreshadows when the church actually does burn down days later.

Point of View/Narrative Voice:
The point of view is first person, with Ponyboy as the narrator and main character. This makes the story interesting because Ponyboy is a sixteen-year-old member of a gang living in the ghetto. The point of view has a big impact on the novel because the narrative feels realistic. S.E. Hinton was actually a teenager herself when she wrote The Outsiders.

Affective Issues Related to the Work:
Most teenagers could easily relate to the messages in The Outsiders. In the novel, Ponyboy discovers a lot about life and has emotions that most adolescents can empathize with. Ponyboy learns that the Socs aren’t as different as he once thought. Both the Socs and the greasers watch sunsets, have families, and have problems just as Ponyboy does, and just as kids reading The Outsiders do.

Vocabulary Issues:
Most of the vocabulary in The Outsiders is fairly easy to understand (after all, it is a 14-year-old narrator). Students may have a few problems with words and pop culture that were popular in the time period the author wrote it, but are no longer part of our every-day speech. One example of this is a reference to Paul Newman on the first page. Most students will need help with identifying ‘50s and ‘60s terminology in the novel.

Major Concepts:
Students may need some guidance with the major concepts of The Outsiders, but most are familiar to kids, such as that of friendship and hate. While the themes and concepts are simple, there is a lot of room for discussion and thought for the students.

Background Knowledge:
In order to understand The Outsiders, students will need some background knowledge about what life was like for inner-city kids in the ‘50s and ‘60s. The novel will mean a lot more to the students if they have an idea of what Ponyboy was living with.

Implications for Diversity:
The implications for diversity are huge in The Outsiders. Although the characters in the book are not ethnically or racially diverse, the diversity enters the picture because

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of socio-economic level. In *The Outsiders*, Hinton shows that such diversity has just as many challenges as that of race. Diverse students would most likely enjoy this novel because, like Ponyboy, they too understand what it means to feel alone and different. The ending of *The Outsiders* will be especially useful as Ponyboy realizes how similar everyone’s situation is. When Randy is amazed that a “greaser” could become a hero, Ponyboy says, "‘Greaser’ didn’t have anything to do with it. My buddy over there wouldn’t have done it. Maybe you would have done the same thing, maybe a friend of yours wouldn’t have. It’s the individual” (p. 115).

**Gender Issues:**

Gender does not play an overt role in *The Outsiders*, but the very absence of females could be considered an issue. The only females that play a part in the novel are Cherry, a sympathetic Soc, and Sandy, Sodapop’s girlfriend who gets pregnant. Females are not an important part of the story, but while Sandy is not a great female role model, Cherry is a heroine who readers can admire.

**What Students Should Remember:**

I think the most memorable and important aspect of the novel is the realizations that Ponyboy makes. People are all the same, no matter what they look like on the outside; people are heroes in many different ways and the heroism may be unexpected; the importance of real friendship. I hope students will remember the things they learn about human beings from *The Outsiders*.

**Central Question/Enduring Issue:**

What makes a hero?
What is true friendship?
How can we look beyond differences and find community?

**Research/Project Ideas:**

1. Students will write poems about their own identity and make comparisons with Ponyboy’s discoveries about himself.
2. Students will do a research project about gangs or other problems (such as violence, truancy, drugs, etc.) in inner city high schools.
3. The students will write an obituary for Dally or Johnny.
4. Students will design the front page of a newspaper including articles about the murder, saving the children from the fire, and Johnny and Dally’s deaths.
5. Students can research the culture of the 1960s—the movies, the crime, etc.

**Informational/Functional Texts:**

1. A text about gangs
2. A text that addressed the culture of the 1960s
3. A informational text about Oklahoma during the ‘60s

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