

Honorable Finalist, Level II

Paul Abou Haidar

Letter to author S. E. Hinton concerning her book *The Outsiders*

Dear S. E. Hinton:

Although it was only 192 pages long, I never would have thought that your book *The Outsiders* had such depth to it. It impacted me and changed my thinking. Initially, trying to understand and relate to a poor boy affiliated with gangs seemed abnormal to me. Upon reading the novel, however, I saw that in quite a few cases, Ponyboy's thinking and mine were quite similar. The novel made me recognize the consequences of my complacent behavior.

I learned we both ran away from trouble, rather than confronting and learning from it. I would shirk my way out of my teachers' grasps and go on to repeat the same mistakes. Ponyboy allowed me to see that I need to change the path I was headed or reap hard consequences.

In the past, running away from trouble was as automatic and instinctive to me as running away from snakes (of which I am afraid). If I was kicked out of a class, I would automatically defend myself and attempt to justify what I did even if I was wrong. I don't want to suffer the consequences of what I do, but it's the only way to learn and change my behavior. I witnessed that after Ponyboy ran away from home he assimilated the bad behaviors of the people who had negatively influenced him, like Dally. Instead of being the conscientious and innocent boy he was, Ponyboy began losing the values that made him a likeable character. Eventually, Ponyboy realized that if he had only just made better decisions none of the unnecessary drama with the police and his family would have happened. I was determined not to be like that. You opened my eyes to see that by not facing facts, I tarnished my reputation and suffered from lying.

Recently, I was involved with a good friend in an incident of cheating at school. He asked for help in writing an essay on a test, and rather than telling him how to do it, I shared mine with him, which he partially copied. With a penitent conscience, he later confessed to our teacher that he had copied from me. The worst part was that when the teacher questioned me about it I blatantly lied, angering him so much that he gave my essay a failing grade: getting into trouble with my teacher and getting the failing grade could have been avoided if only I had told the truth. I suffered harshly because I ran from the truth instead of owning up to it. Since then, I have become prudent at realizing how to cope with trouble. Perhaps my main issue was that I mistakenly perceived "loyalty" to my gang (i.e. friends) to be above honesty, which the book helped me realize (because of what happened to Ponyboy), was not the right choice. There are plenty of other ways in which I could have helped my friend in that situation and still be a true friend. Allowing him to cheat from me denigrated both of us

Overall, your book *The Outsiders* opened me to the truth about how dishonesty can hurt a person. It helped me to dramatically change the way I conduct myself. Ponyboy's struggle and choosing the wrong path led to pernicious consequences. It is a timely warning which allowed me to open my eyes and change my direction, acting proactively to prevent any future incidents from occurring.

Thank you so much for writing such an amazing book.

Paul Abou Haidar