

*This guide was prepared using the 1989 Dell Laurel-Leaf Library edition, © 1975. Other editions may differ.*

#### SYNOPSIS

**Chap. 1:** The narrator, Rusty-James, is sitting by the ocean when an old friend, Steve Hays, whom he hasn't seen for five or six years runs into him. Steve is surprised and delighted to see Rusty-James and looks forward to getting together later to talk about the "good old days." Rusty-James doesn't remember much about those days, he tells Steve—"my memory is screwed up some"—but they include five years in the reformatory and fights that left scars. Today, Rusty-James leads an aimless existence of just "bumming around." When Steve says, "You know who you look just like?" Rusty-James feels fear creeping up his backbone, and he suddenly remembers everything he has only wanted to forget. Chapters 2 through 11 tell this story.

**Chap. 2:** Rusty-James, at age 14, is a tough-talking hood who hangs out with his other junior-high buddies at Benny's pool hall in their rough, run-down section of town. Midget arrives at Benny's with word that Biff Wilcox has challenged Rusty-James to a fight that night because of a remark he made to a girl at school. Rusty-James accepts the challenge because he has to protect his rep, even though the absent Motorcycle Boy stopped gang fighting several years ago. Rusty-James gets angry at the mention of the Motorcycle Boy, while both his cautious best friend Steve and Smokey Bennet emphasize that Rusty-James has to do whatever he can to keep the fight just between himself and Biff and not let it escalate into a gang-type rumble.

**Chap. 3:** Rusty-James visits his bleached-blonde, tough-sassy girl friend, Patty, who accuses him of flirting with other girls and then cries about his fighting again. Headed for the fight, Rusty-James is exhilarated and noisy, while Smokey is edgy and quiet. Rusty-James notes that Smokey "would have been number-one tough cat in our neighborhood if it wasn't for me"; maintaining this status is of utmost importance to Rusty-James. In the vacant lot behind the pet store, the fight begins. Even though Biff unfairly pulls out a knife, Rusty-James prevails. As Rusty-James is pounding Biff's head into the ground, the Motorcycle Boy suddenly appears, distracting Rusty-James. Biff grabs the chance to slash Rusty-James down his side, and the Motorcycle Boy retaliates by breaking Biff's wrist. The fight ends, Rusty-James maintains his macho image by refusing Steve's suggestion that he needs to go to the hospital, and Rusty-James and the Motorcycle Boy, accompanied by Steve, go home to their apartment.

The Motorcycle Boy turns out to be Rusty-James's idolized older brother, former president of their former gang who loved fighting and still constantly steals motorcycles. (He is just back from a two-week trip to California on a stolen bike.) The Motorcycle Boy is a legendary, awesomely respected figure in their section of the city, a natural and charismatic leader. Rusty-James's ambition in life is to grow up to be just

like his brother. But the Motorcycle Boy is a highly enigmatic character. His face is expressionless; he sees things other people don't see, and laughs when nothing seems funny; sometimes he turns deaf; he often appears to be completely removed from his surroundings, unaware of the people he's with.

**Chap. 4:** Rusty-James needs some money; his father often drinks up the cash from his government check before giving his son any money. So Rusty-James steals a set of cool hubcaps, handing each one to an abstracted Steve, who's so worried about his recently hospitalized mother that he doesn't notice he's taking part in a theft, something he ordinarily would never do. The car's owners appear and chase Rusty-James and Steve, who throw away the hubcaps and barely escape by jumping across roofs.

**Chap. 5:** Back at his apartment building, Rusty-James has a brief encounter in the hallway with Cassandra, a substitute teacher who is living on the wrong side of the tracks in fruitless pursuit of the Motorcycle Boy. In the family apartment, a less-drunk-than-usual father—formerly a lawyer—comes home, notices that his older son has returned after being gone for a while ("I haven't seen you for quite some time") and that his younger son has been injured in a knife fight ("Russel-James, please be more careful in the future") and concludes, "What strange lives you two lead." Rusty-James muses to himself that he gets along okay with his father but doesn't like or respect the man because all he does all day and night is drink. The Motorcycle Boy says of his trip to California, "It was one laugh after another. Even better than here, amusing as this place is." The father replies, "You are exactly like your mother," who deserted the family so long ago that Rusty-James doesn't remember her.

**Chap. 6:** When Rusty-James arrives at school the next afternoon, it's the last straw in a long string of offenses; he is expelled and told to report next week to Cleveland High, Biff Wilcox's turf. Then Rusty-James goes to see Patty, who breaks up with him because she's heard about his antics the previous night, when he went to the lake with Smokey and fooled around with a girl there. At the drugstore, Rusty-James runs into the Motorcycle Boy, who comments about his neighborhood notoriety, "It's a bit of a burden to be Robin Hood, Jesse James, and the Pied Piper." Rusty-James understands: "The Pied Piper. Man, those guys would have followed you anywhere. Hell, most of them still would." The Motorcycle Boy responds, "It would be great, if I could think of somewhere to go."

**Chap. 7:** That night, on Rusty-James's suggestion, he, the Motorcycle Boy, and Steve go downtown, across the river. Rusty-James is exhilarated by the lights, crowds of people, noise, and energy. The lights and colors do nothing for the Motorcycle Boy, though; he's totally color-blind. Rusty-James and Steve swig from a bottle of liquor, but the Motorcycle Boy doesn't drink, saying, "I like control." They stop in

## RUMPLE FISH

for a while at a skin flick, which shocks Steve. The Motorcycle Boy shares some surprising information with Rusty-James: He went to California to track down their mother, which he did, having what was evidently an unsatisfying encounter ("It was one of the funniest things she'd ever heard of. I'd forgotten we both had the same sense of humor."). Also, he explains that Rusty-James is afraid of being alone anywhere, any time, because when their mother left home, their father went on a binge and left two-year-old Rusty-James home alone in their "very large" house for three days.

**Chap. 8:** Later that evening, Rusty-James and Steve pass out in a bar in a very rough section of town where the Motorcycle Boy is playing pool. When they come to, the Motorcycle Boy is gone. The boys cautiously pick their way along the dark streets toward the river and are stopped by two muggers. One of the thugs bashes Rusty-James in the head with a tire iron; the boy has an out-of-body near-death experience, and when he comes to, he is propped up against the Motorcycle Boy, who arrived in the nick of time to save both Rusty-James and Steve from the muggers. As Rusty-James lapses in and out of consciousness through the night, the Motorcycle Boy talks on and on in a strange, abstracted monologue. Rusty-James realizes his brother is completely alone: "He was living in a glass bubble and watching the world from it." And when Rusty-James remembers fondly the great sense of belonging the gang had given him, his brother responds, "It wasn't anything." Rusty-James comes to another realization about his brother: "He didn't belong—anywhere—and what was worse, he didn't want to."

**Chap. 9:** Again, Rusty-James refuses to go to the hospital for his injury. When he stops by Steve's house, he discovers his friend's father has severely beaten Steve for coming in very late. Rusty-James tells Steve he has a strong feeling that they need to follow the Motorcycle Boy around for a while, to keep an eye on him. Steve refuses, saying, "You never think about anything, about where you're going or how you're going to get there. I got to think for myself, I can't keep on thinking for you." Rusty-James doesn't understand, thinking, "I did think about where I was going. I wanted to be like the Motorcycle Boy. I wanted to be tough like him, and stay calm and laughing when things got dangerous. I wanted to be the toughest street-fighter and the most respected hood on our side of the river." Steve warns, "You better let go of the Motorcycle Boy." Rusty-James leaves; it's the last time he sees Steve until their encounter that opens the novel.

**Chap. 10:** Smokey and Patty hook up, and Rusty-James realizes Smokey has orchestrated it all: the lake party, the girls, the word getting back to Patty, her break-up with Rusty-James happening when he's too wounded to fight Smokey about it all. Now Smokey is the top tough cat; Rusty-James has lost his cherished rep. Smokey points out to Rusty-James that he would never have been a successful gang leader because he doesn't have the brains of the Motorcycle Boy. Sadly, Rusty-James realizes this is true: "Nothing was like I thought it was. I had always thought...if you were the toughest, you were the leader." Later, Rusty-James finds the Motorcycle Boy at Mr. Dobson's pet store, where his brother has been absorbed for a long time watching the Siamese fighting fish. When Rusty-James asks why each fish is in its own bowl, the Motorcycle Boy responds, "Rumble fish. They'd kill each other if they could," and then muses aloud, "Wonder if they'd act that way in the river."

**Chap. 11:** At home, Rusty-James asks his father if his

mother was crazy. The father says no, adding, "Every now and then a person comes along who has a different view of the world than does the usual person"—a description of both the boys' mother and the Motorcycle Boy. That night, Rusty-James follows the Motorcycle Boy as he breaks into the pet store, turns on the lights, releases all the animals, and heads for the river with the rumble fish. The police arrive on the scene almost immediately, shots are fired, and Rusty-James runs toward the bridge to find his brother dead in the street, smiling. Thrown up against a police car, Rusty-James discovers he's become color-blind and temporarily deaf, just as the Motorcycle Boy was: "I was in a glass bubble and everyone else was outside it and I'd be alone like that for the rest of my life." Sound returns and the noise is deafening, but Rusty-James is "shaking because I was still alone."

**Chap. 12:** Returning to the present, Steve tells Rusty-James about their old neighborhood, "I made up my mind I'd get out of that place and I did....I learned that if you want to get somewhere, you just make up your mind and work like hell till you get there." Rusty-James agrees, "Yeah. It'll be nice when I can think of someplace to go." As Steve talks, Rusty-James becomes absorbed by the sound of the waves and tunes him out, coming back to attention as Steve finishes, "...right about that. I never thought you would, but you do. You don't sound like him, though." Rusty-James has achieved his ambition of being just like his older brother, but in ways he never imagined. Steve leaves, looking forward to seeing his old friend again soon, but Rusty-James has no intention of ever seeing Steve again: "I figured if I didn't see him, I'd start forgetting again. But it's been taking me longer than I thought it would."

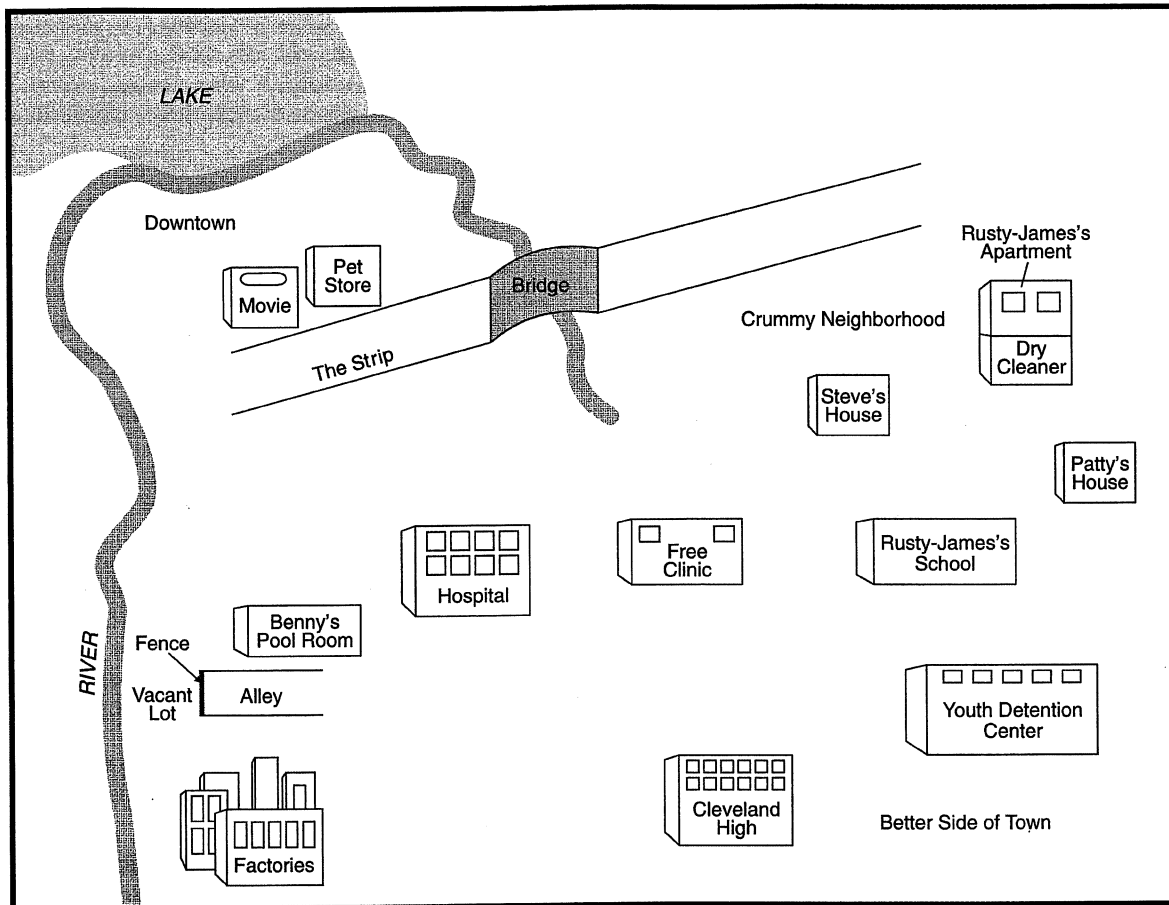
### TIME LINE

<b>Rusty James is 11</b>	Gang activity stops in the neighborhood.
<b>age 14</b>	<b>day 1</b> Rusty-James and Biff fight; the Motorcycle Boy suddenly reappears after a 2-week trip to California.
<b>next day</b>	Rusty-James involves Steve in a hub-cap-stealing episode.
<b>that night</b>	Rusty-James goes to the lake with Smokey.
<b>next afternoon</b>	Rusty-James is expelled from school and Patty breaks up with him.
<b>that night</b>	Rusty-James, Steve, and the Motorcycle Boy spend a wild night out downtown; the Motorcycle Boy saves Rusty-James and Steve from death at hands of muggers.
<b>next day</b>	Rusty-James finds the Motorcycle Boy at the pet store.
<b>that night</b>	Motorcycle Boy, with Rusty-James following, breaks into the pet store; police kill the Motorcycle Boy and take Rusty-James into custody.
<b>age 14-19</b>	Rusty-James is in the reformatory.
<b>age 19 or 20</b>	Steve and Rusty-James encounter each other on an ocean beach.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Susan Eloise Hinton was catapaulted to the forefront of young adult authorship when she was just seventeen years old. She was born in 1950 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she grew up and has lived for most of her life; Tulsa is the

## RUMBLE FISH



unnamed small urban setting of many of her novels. Hinton began writing in grammar school, mostly about cowboys (which she wanted to be) and horses (which she wanted to own).

She began the first draft of her first novel, *The Outsiders*, when she was just fifteen, attending Will Rogers High School in Tulsa. The plot revolves around the violent conflict between greasers and upper-class "Socs," a social environment Hinton (not a member of any group herself) was familiar with at her school. During the year and a half Hinton was writing the novel, she also earned a D in a creative writing course. Her motivation for writing was to create some realistic fiction for teenagers, in place of the insipid romances, sports stories, and girl-and-her-horse tales prevalent at the time. The publication of *The Outsiders* in 1967 when Hinton was seventeen revolutionized young adult fiction. Many critics consider this novel the first example of the New Realism in YA literature. It dealt with many topics new to the genre—violence, clashes between upper- and lower-class kids, the thoughts and feelings and experiences of machismo-acting "greaser" protagonists, dysfunctional families, drugs, alcohol, law-breaking, crime, and gangs. While some parents and authorities were dismayed about these aspects of the novel, its authentic voice made it a huge bestseller among teen readers.

Hinton used money she earned from the novel to help pay her tuition at the University of Tulsa, where she met her future husband David Inhofe. In 1970, she earned her degree

in education and married Inhofe; the couple later had one son. Hinton's second novel, *That Was Then, This Is Now*, was published in 1971. Narrated, like its predecessor, in the direct and honest voice of a confused teenage male, this novel explores the changing relationship between two formerly inseparable foster brothers as one begins to grow and change and the other resists the process. *Rumble Fish* appeared in 1975, and *Tex* followed in 1979. Both continue in the S. E. Hinton tradition of first-person teenage male narration dealing with delinquent youths, violence, and dysfunctional families, and both explore the difficulties in the relationship between the narrator and his admired older brother who are living without parental supervision.

Starting in 1982, Hinton became involved in the filming of her immensely popular novels, doing some of the script writing and assisting on the set in many ways. A shy and non-group person, Hinton was delighted to discover she enjoyed her work with the movie people, and she liked the finished film adaptations. *Tex* was released in 1982, starring Matt Dillon as Tex and Hinton's own horse as the novel's Negrito. Films of *Rumble Fish* (directed by Francis Ford Coppola, with an outstanding cast) and *The Outsiders*, both also starring Dillon, appeared in 1983. *That Was Then, This Is Now*, starring Emilio Estevez, followed in 1985.

Hinton produced another young adult novel, *Taming the Star Runner*, published in 1988, again with a troubled teen male protagonist. In the 1990's Hinton switched genres, writing *Big David, Little David* (1994), a picture-book reader, and

## RUMPLE FISH

*The Puppy Sister* (1995), a whimsical tale about a puppy transforming into a human girl. Both of these were well-received by the critics.

### CRITICS' CORNER

Hinton's groundbreaking and lasting contribution to young adult fiction was recognized in 1988, when Hinton received the first American Library Association/*School Library Journal* Author Achievement award for her body of work. Hinton brought new features to YA fiction: realistic characters who talk and act like real teenagers, settings that are far removed from the comfortable upper-middle-class milieu of earlier novels for young people, and complex, real-world challenges such as poverty, substance abuse, violence, and dysfunctional families. A few critics argue that events and teenage characters in Hinton's novels are far from typical in most teens' experiences, but youthful readers have made the books enormous best-sellers from their first appearance.

*Rumble Fish* features elements shared by other Hinton YA novels: the story is narrated in a direct, honest, first-person voice by a teenage protagonist; this narrator is a tough, macho yet tender lower-class boy, a "hood" or "greaser" type who struggles to cope with changing relationships and circumstances as he begins to mature; the novel deals with the inevitable loss of youthful innocence; violence is commonplace in the lives of the novel's characters; adults are largely absent or irrelevant to the lives of the novel's teenage characters; female characters tend to be stereotypical or largely irrelevant; dialogue is immediate and believable; families are dysfunctional.

Critics generally admired *Rumble Fish* and described it as starkly realistic, powerful, and disturbing, even though the future for the narrator appears bleak at the novel's conclusion. Some critics, though, faulted the novel for not offering a stylistic or thematic advance from Hinton's previous two books and commented on the novel's "curiously remote quality," perhaps stemming from the remoteness of the Motorcycle Boy himself. *School Library Journal* found the novel to be "stylistically superb" and "pack[ing] a punch that will leave readers of any age reeling," adding that Rusty-James's descent is "mapped with unflinching honesty and insight." *Horn Book* admired the novel's dialogue and first-person narration as "vibrant and authentic" and the plot as moving "quickly and dramatically." *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* summed up, "Believable, written convincingly in first person, the story line is less a plot than a picture of personality disintegration. Memorable, but with no relief from depression, no note of hope, no variation on the theme."

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To become familiar with some of the many social problems that inner-city teens must deal with as they mature
2. To analyze the causes and effects of a person's alienation from society
3. To explore the point of balance between parental/adult restrictiveness and young people's need for independence
4. To discuss the experience of violence and ways to deal with and avoid it
5. To examine the bonds of friendship and the limits of friendship
6. To consider the dynamics of youth gangs: what brings young people together into gangs, how gangs operate,

and what can cause the disintegration of gangs

7. To consider the issue of identification and over-identification with an admired older sibling or other role model
8. To identify some ways in which families may be dysfunctional and the effects of those family difficulties on family members

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the elements of Rusty-James's idealized identification with his older brother and his growing realization of the Motorcycle Boy's real character
2. To understand the irony of the nature of Rusty-James's ultimate assumption of his older brother's persona
3. To analyze the situation and dynamics of Rusty-James's family
4. To examine the use of violence and defiance of authority as plot elements in the novel
5. To identify the effects the physical and social environment have had on both Rusty-James and the Motorcycle Boy
6. To discuss Rusty-James's need for belonging and the role that gang activity used to play in his life
7. To trace Rusty-James's tragic coming of age as he loses everything that has had meaning to him
8. To interpret the symbolic meaning of the Motorcycle Boy's color-blindness, nickname, and fascination with the rumble fish
9. To identify examples of animal imagery in the novel
10. To relate the author's writing style to the novel's subject matter and narrator

### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

To enhance students' appreciation and understanding of the novel, present them with these terms.

**coming-of-age novel:** a work of fiction in which the main character moves into and/or through adolescence and develops at least the beginnings of maturity. In this novel, Rusty-James experiences a shattering coming of age, as he realizes maintaining a tough-guy image won't bring him the leadership and admiration the Motorcycle Boy enjoyed and attains his ambition of being just like his adored older brother in dreadful ways he never dreamed of.

**dialogue:** the speeches of characters in a novel or play. Critics admire the realistic dialogue of the teenage characters in all of S. E. Hinton's novels. One of the Language Arts activities in the "Across the Curriculum" section of this guide asks students to try their hand at writing dialogue for fictional teenagers.

**first-person narration:** the telling of a novel or short story in the voice of one of the characters in the novel, giving that person's personal point of view of events. (Sometimes a novel may have more than one first-person narrator.) In this novel, Rusty-James is the narrator, and the changes he has experienced and the things that have happened confuse and disturb him and have left him detached and memory-impaired, so no solution is offered at the novel's end. Ask the students how the novel would be different in another voice, especially that of an impersonal narrator—less open-ended, perhaps, but less effective?

**"new realism":** as applied to young adult literature, the move to deal with the real, serious, and often disturbing problems teens face in real life, such as violence, drug abuse,

## RUMPLE FISH

dysfunctional families, social conflict, and wrenching change—all issues that are a part of *Rumble Fish*. The movie was a reaction against the unrealistic young adult novels that commonly dealt with the trauma of whether Mary Jane could get a date with the football captain, whether Chip could carry his baseball team to victory, or whether Susie would find happiness with her horse. Hinton's first novel, *The Outsiders*, published in 1967, is considered by many critics as the first young adult novel in the new realism mode.

**symbolism:** the use of elements in a literary work that stand for something else. In this novel, the Motorcycle Boy's color-blindness symbolizes the way in which he experiences and interprets life in black and white; his on-again and off-again deafness stands for the way in which the Motorcycle Boy alternately tunes in to and tunes out of what's happening around him; and the rumble fish in their individual glass bowls are a symbol of the way the Motorcycle Boy experiences life, trapped inside a bubble, isolated from and unable to touch the world around him.

### SETTINGS

Most of the novel's settings are only sketchily described. The overall setting is a small, unspecified U.S. city (presumably Tulsa, S. E. Hinton's home town), with most of the action occurring in the gritty lower-class section where Rusty-James lives. Rusty-James and his junior-high neighborhood buddies hang out at Benny's pool hall, where Rusty-James gets the message about Biff Wilcox's challenge to fight and where Rusty-James yields his rep when Smokey and Patty meet publicly there. The fight with Biff takes place in a damp vacant lot behind Mr. Dobson's pet store; later, the Motorcycle Boy becomes absorbed at the pet store in watching the rumble fish in their individual glass bowls and returns at night to break in and release all the animals. The vacant lot, along with Rusty-James's entire neighborhood, stinks from the polluted river that borders this section of town. Across the river are all the bright lights, crowds of people, and action of the downtown, where Rusty-James, Steve, and the Motorcycle Boy spend a raucous night that ends on a dark street with two muggers almost killing the younger boys, whom the Motorcycle Boy rescues in the nick of time.

The bridge over the river connects these two disparate sections of town; the Motorcycle Boy often stops here and watches the water, and in the novel's climax he is shot to death by the police just before reaching the bridge to release the rumble fish in the river. Rusty-James and the Motorcycle Boy share a drab walk-up apartment with their father; their home features one mattress and one cot for the three of them. In one scene, Rusty-James visits his girl friend Patty at her house, where she looks after her little brothers while her mother's at work. Rusty-James describes one day at school; the next time he goes to school (late), he's expelled. He makes his first, and only, visit to Steve's house near the end of the novel and is impressed at how nice it is, "with furniture and carpets and stuff sitting on shelves." The encounter between Rusty-James and Steve in the opening and closing chapters of the novel takes place on an ocean beach; we guess it's probably California, since that's where the Motorcycle Boy traveled to find their mother just before his death.

### CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about gangs, adolescence, substance abuse, and other subjects and issues deriving from

the novel, consult these sources:

#### Books

- Jules Archer, *The Incredible Sixties: The Stormy Years That Changed America*  
Stevan E. Atanasoff, *How to Survive as a Teen: When No One Understands*  
S. Beth Atkin, *Voices from the Streets: Young Former Gang Members Tell Their Stories*  
Wayne Coffey, *Straight Talk About Drinking: Teenagers Speak Out About Alcohol*  
Jeremy Daldry, *The Teenage Guy's Survival Guide*  
Andrew Edelstein & Kevin McDonough, *The Seventies: From Hotpants to Hot Tubs*  
Nora Ephron, *Teenage Romance, or How to Die of Embarrassment*  
Greg Felsen, *Can You Do It Until You Need Glasses? The Different Drug Book*  
Donald R. Gallo, ed., *No Easy Answers: Short Stories About Teenagers Making Tough Choices*  
Michael Garrett, *The Seventies*  
Sol Gordon, *The Teenage Survival Book*  
Michael Gurian, *From Boys to Men: All About Adolescence and You*  
Herb Hendler, *Year by Year in the Rock Era*  
Maria Hinojosa, *Crews: Gang Members Talk to Maria Hinojosa*  
Dennis T. Jaffe & Ted Clark, *Worlds Apart: Young People and Drug Programs*  
Elaine Landau, *Teenage Violence*  
Susan Lang, *Teen Violence*  
Barbara Moe, *Coping as a Survivor of Violent Crime*  
Joan Morrison and Robert K. Morrison, *From Camelot to Kent State: The Sixties Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It*  
Sandra Lee Smith, *Coping with Decision Making*  
Alan Sussman, *The Rights of Young People: An American Civil Liberties Union Handbook*  
Ann E. Weiss, *Lies, Deception and Truth*  
**Computer Software/CD-Rom**  
*How Your Body Works: The Interactive Encyclopedia of the Human Body* (Mindscape)  
*The Ultimate Human Body: A Multimedia Guide to the Body and How It Works* (DK Multimedia)

#### Internet

- "Beta Barracks": <[beta.barracks.ourfamily.com/](http://beta.barracks.ourfamily.com/)>  
"Beta Splendens":  
<[members.tripod.com/~Be\\_A\\_Man/betta/change.html](http://members.tripod.com/~Be_A_Man/betta/change.html)>  
"Bullying: A Survival Guide":  
<[www.bbc.co.uk/education/bully/deal.htm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/bully/deal.htm)>  
"Colorblind": <[members.aol.com/nocolorvsn/color.htm](http://members.aol.com/nocolorvsn/color.htm)>  
"The Coroner's Report (Information and Resources on Gang Intervention and Prevention)": <[www.gangwar.com/](http://www.gangwar.com/)>  
"Crisis, Grief, and Healing": <[www.webhealing.com](http://www.webhealing.com)>  
"Gang Violence":  
<[www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Quad/5889/gangs.htm](http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Quad/5889/gangs.htm)>  
"Motorcycle Travelogues": <[dir.yahoo.com/Recreation/Automotive/Motorcycles/Travelogues/](http://dir.yahoo.com/Recreation/Automotive/Motorcycles/Travelogues/)>

#### Video

- Alcohol and Your Body: Assessing the Damage* (Human Relations Media)  
*Binge Drinking Blowout: Educating Teens About Alcohol Use*

## RUMPLE FISH

(Aquarius Health Care Videos)

*Gangs in My Little Town? Three Teens Find Out the Truth* (Noodlehead Network)

*Gangs: The Tough Decision to stay Out* (TMW Media Group)  
*I Didn't Think It Would Happen to Me: The Truth About Hero-*  
*in* (Human Relations Media)

*Loud Music and Hearing Loss* (Aims)

*Real People: Drugs and Teens—The Hidden Problem* (Sunburst)

*Refusal Skills: Yes, You Can Say No* (Learning Seed)

*The Right Choices: Skills for Life* (Sunburst)

*Risk-Taking: Thinking It Through* (Sunburst)

*Rumble Fish* (directed by Francis Ford Coppola)

*Speak Up Against Violence* (New Frontier/Unified Learning)

*Straight Talk II Violent Times Series* (Attainment Co.)

*Teen Drinking: You Don't Have to Do It* (Promedion Prods./  
Lucerne Media)

*When Friends Mean Trouble* (Sunburst)

### THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in *That Was Then, This Is Now* should include these aspects.

#### Themes

- pointlessness of violence
- loyalty and betrayal and the passing of friendship
- the loss of innocence and coming of age
- the need to belong and be loved
- emulation of an older sibling
- abandonment
- delinquent youth
- alienation from society

#### Motifs

- dysfunctional families
- substance abuse
- animal imagery
- law-breaking
- social class tensions
- motorcycles and vehicle theft
- gang activity
- adolescent romance
- color-blindness
- deafness
- fighting fish

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each as it relates to the book. Use the chapter and page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context if you wish.

1. the reformatory (Chap. 1, p. 3)  
*(A reformatory is a jail facility for young or first offenders that puts its emphasis on training and reformation of its inmates. For going along with the Motorcycle Boy when he breaks into the pet store, Rusty-James is sent to the reformatory at the age of fourteen for five years. When he gets out, he and a friend start drifting around and end up staying in an oceanside town.)*
2. Everybody else had to be there [at the fight] to protect their rep. (Chap. 2, p. 9)  
*(Rusty-James notes that his friends have to be present at the scheduled fight between himself and Biff Wilcox. There's a possibility that Biff's and Rusty-James's friends will be drawn into the fight, so failing to be there would signal a lack of toughness and unwillingness to*

*fight, which would be a deadly blow to a young man's rep, or tough-guy macho reputation. For Rusty-James, his top tough-cat rep is all-important.)*

3. some cat who's been washing down bennies with sneaky pete (Chap. 3, p. 23)  
*(Sneaky pete is homemade or inferior commercially made liquor or wine. Rusty-James's father always has some at home, and Rusty-James adds cherry vodka to some sneaky pete for a beverage to share with Steve during their night on the town. At the fight with Biff, Rusty-James is annoyed that Biff has been popping pills—bennies, Benzedrine, a stimulant. Rusty-James hates fighting people who are high on dope and alcohol, because they act crazy and unpredictably.)*
4. "Kid, I never got past the river." (Chap. 3, p. 30)  
*(This is one of the Motorcycle Boy's cryptic comments. Rusty-James doesn't understand what his brother means, and we can only guess. The Motorcycle Boy may be saying that in spite of going to California, he did not escape who he is, a troubled youth defined by the hard, gritty, colorless neighborhood he's grown up in, a neighborhood bounded by the river. In order to get out of the neighborhood and its negative effect on a person's character, you have to cross the river and get to the bright lights, energy, and action on the other side. The Motorcycle Boy hasn't done this in spite of his trip to California.)*
5. "Did you know I got expelled from school?...I handed in perfect semester tests." (Chap. 3, p. 34)  
*(This is another one of the Motorcycle Boy's cryptic comments. Maybe he did actually hand in perfect semester tests, because he's clearly very intelligent, and the school authorities may have automatically assumed he cheated on the tests, not believing he could be smart enough to do that well. Or maybe this is a joking comment that means something other than what it seems to say, a meaning that only the Motorcycle Boy knows.)*
6. He had a choice of new math or business math. (Chap. 4, p. 44)  
*(New math is a unified, sequential system of teaching math in accord with set theory and to reveal basic concepts, especially popular in the later 1960s and 1970s when this novel was written. Business math is taught using traditional approaches and is often geared to students who won't be going on to higher education. Naturally, Rusty-James is placed in business math as part of his "dumb classes" curriculum. Steve is normally in the "smart classes," but he's terrible at math and has opted to take business math rather than new math. Because of their school's tracking policy, this is the first time Rusty-James and Steve have been in a class together.)*
7. He was color-blind, too. (Chap. 5, p. 55)  
*(A person who is color-blind doesn't recognize colors, especially red and green. Color-blindness is a congenital defect that affects more men than women. The Motorcycle Boy is totally color-blind, which symbolizes the black-and-white, monochromatic way in which he views the world. His color-blindness contrasts sharply with the way colors excite and exhilarate Rusty-James.)*
8. "You know what happened to people who didn't believe in Cassandra." "The Greeks got 'em." (Chap. 5, p. 59)  
*(This is an example of the type of conversation or*

## RUMPLE FISH

exchange between the Motorcycle Boy and his father that is way over Rusty-James's head. A young woman who lives in their apartment building has a yen for the Motorcycle Boy. Rusty-James says he believes this Cassandra when she says she's not hooked on heroin. The Motorcycle Boy replies with a reference to the Cassandra of Greek mythology, to whom the gods gave the gift of prophecy, which was negated by Apollo's edict that no one would believe Cassandra's accurate predictions. The boys' father shows that he has picked up on this reference by mentioning the Greeks. Rusty-James hasn't a clue what either of them is talking about; he's still thinking of their neighbor Cassandra and doesn't know a thing about Greek mythology.)

9. "I wonder when I'm gonna stop being a little kid." "Not ever." "Is that supposed to be a prophecy or a curse?" (Chap. 7, pp. 77-78)  
(When the Motorcycle Boy predicts that Rusty-James will never grow up, Steve angrily asks if this is a prophecy—a prediction of what's going to happen in the future—or a curse—a condition that the Motorcycle Boy has just condemned his brother to by these words. In fact, Rusty-James does stop being a little kid the moment the Motorcycle Boy dies and Rusty-James is infused with his brother's detached, living-inside-a-bubble persona.)
10. "That was pretty good. Did you ever think of trying out for a chameleon?" (Chap. 7, p. 80)  
(Once again, the Motorcycle Boy makes a remark that goes completely over Rusty-James's head. In the X-rated movie house, Rusty-James puts his feet up on the back of the chair in front of him, then scowls so fiercely at the chair's objecting occupant that the man moves rather than confront Rusty-James. This is in such contrast to Rusty-James's exuberant, young-kid demeanor just a short time ago that his brother suggests he's like a chameleon. Steve understands, but Rusty-James thinks the Motorcycle Boy is talking about trying out for a gang named the Chameleons.)

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important, and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

#### Questions 1-4 (Literal Level)

1. Describe the physical and social environment Rusty-James has grown up in. How has this affected Rusty-James?  
(Rusty-James lives in a rough, run-down, dingy section of town; all the bright lights, crowds of people, and action are across the river. The smell of the polluted river pervades this neighborhood. The teenagers here are mostly hoods, former gang members, who hang out at local pool halls. Many adults, like Rusty-James's father, depend on government checks for support. Rusty-James's home is a drab apartment with "a mattress and a cot" for Rusty-James, his father, and his brother to sleep on. This environment has affected Rusty-James in predictable ways: he's a tough-acting greaser with no aspirations [other than to emulate his older brother], since his drab, depressing surroundings offer no sugges-
- tions of escape. Mired in his disadvantaged position, Rusty-James has little respect for authority, as he routinely breaks school rules, gets into fights, and steals things.)
2. How has gang activity changed since Rusty-James was younger? How do Rusty-James and the Motorcycle Boy feel about this change?  
(Gangs used to be the focal point of life for the young people in town, or at least in Rusty-James's section of town. Gang fights, rumbles, and attacks on individual rival gang members were common, with each gang jealously protecting its own turf. Rusty-James remembers the gang days with nostalgia; he misses the excitement of the fights and the sense of belonging that his gang provided for him, and he regrets that he won't be able to follow in the footsteps of his older brother and take over as president of the Packers. The Motorcycle Boy feels quite differently. He was the one who decreed that the rumbles and gang fighting stop, because the gang action wasn't fun for him anymore, it was boring. He also notes that the gang fighting was going to stop anyway, because too many people were doing dope.)
3. What laws and school rules does Rusty-James violate in the course of the novel? What violent incidents is Rusty-James involved in?  
(At school, Rusty-James arrives late regularly and cheats on tests. He has recently been caught bringing a switchblade to school, and when he's being expelled, the guidance counselor names many other past offenses that year: "fighting, swearing, smoking, sassing the teacher, cutting classes...." On the street, Rusty-James fights, steals hubcaps and aspirin, sneaks into an X-rated movie, and drinks alcohol, and he goes along when the Motorcycle Boy breaks into the pet store and releases all the animals. Rusty-James's life is full of violence: the fight with Biff Wilcox, previous gang-related fights, the mugging when he suffers a near-fatal head injury, the Motorcycle Boy's fatal shooting, rough handling by the police, and his attempt to slash his wrists.)
4. In the course of this novel, Rusty-James loses the three things that have meaning for him. What are those things? How and why does this happen?  
(By the end of the novel, Rusty-James has lost the girl friend he thinks he loves, his cherished rep [top tough-cat reputation], and, worst of all, his adored older brother. Smokey Bennett, an ally/rival, orchestrates the loss of Patty and the rep. He takes Rusty-James to the lake, making sure girls join them and lure Rusty-James into fooling around; Smokey then makes sure word of this gets back to Patty, who is so mad that she breaks up with Rusty-James the next day. Smokey hooks up with Patty immediately, knowing that Rusty-James is too wounded from the knife gashing to fight him about all this right now. Rusty-James's failure to fight costs him his top tough-cat rep, which now belongs to Smokey, just as Smokey had planned. Surprisingly, Rusty-James isn't mad about what's happened; he has come to realize that although he may be the toughest, he hasn't got the brains to be the leader. Rusty-James then loses the Motorcycle Boy when he fails to stop his brother from breaking into the pet store and releasing all the animals. The police shoot and kill the Motorcycle Boy as he is

## RUMPLE FISH

*running toward the bridge to release the rumble fish into the river.)*

### Questions 5-8 (Interpretive Level)

5. In what ways does Rusty-James conform his behavior to a macho creed? Is this his true nature?

*(Rusty-James wants to be the next Motorcycle Boy in his neighborhood—the tough, cool, respected leader. To achieve this status, Rusty-James has cultivated a very tough image and is acknowledged as the “number one tough cat” among his peers and former gang members. He’s careful always to behave in a macho way in front of these peers: he’ll never back down from a fight; after he’s gashed with a knife by Biff Wilcox, he puts on a macho show for Smokey by refusing to go to the hospital and walking home without seeming to lean too much on Steve; he doesn’t cry; he smarts off in a threatening, tough-guy way to people on the street. Inside, though, Rusty-James isn’t quite so tough. He’s afraid of being alone; he’ll stay out all night on the streets surrounded by people rather than be home alone in his apartment. He’s confused by a lot of what the Motorcycle Boy says and does. He has a great emotional need to belong and connect with people. He’s not scared of real things—fights, poverty, police threats—but he’s afraid of his growing awareness of the Motorcycle Boy’s complete alienation from the world and the possibility that he himself might get caught in a matching alienation.)*

6. Describe Rusty-James’s relationship with his father, his mother, his brother, and Steve.

*(Rusty-James’s family is completely dysfunctional. His mother literally abandoned him when he was two years old, walking out with the Motorcycle Boy, age six, but later sending him back. Rusty-James doesn’t remember his mother and thinks of her as dead. His father has in effect abandoned him, living in an alcoholic haze, floating in and out of the apartment, and only sporadically noticing what’s happening in Rusty-James’s life. Rusty-James feels quite detached about his father; he gets along all right with his dad but doesn’t like or respect the man because all he does all day and night is drink. Rusty-James idolizes his older brother, but the Motorcycle Boy in return treats Rusty-James just like everyone else, seldom noticing or paying attention to him. Thoughtful Steve is Rusty-James’s best friend, because Rusty-James has known him all his life and doesn’t have to maintain his tough-cat persona with unmacho Steve. But the friendship ends when Steve refuses to help Rusty-James look after the Motorcycle Boy, Steve explaining that he has to look after himself first.)*

7. What role does Patty play in the novel?

*(Patty is a typical S. E. Hinton female character: a “tough, sweet little chick” who is given the sketchiest of characterizations and plays a minimal role in the novel. She swears, she’s manipulative, she’s jealous, she’s a bleached blonde, she’s fickle, and she’s in and out of Rusty-James’s life in the space of two scenes. Her switch of attachment to Smokey and Rusty-James’s failure to fight Smokey about this trigger the loss of Rusty-James’s rep.)*

8. Rusty-James’s ambition in life is to become just like his brother. What idealized image of himself-as-Motorcycle-Boy does Rusty-James have? In what ways does Rusty-

James actually come to be just like his brother?

*(This is the central tragedy and irony of the novel. For years, Rusty-James has aspired to grow up to be just like his image of his adored, idealized older brother: the ultimately cool, ultimately macho, highly respected and even legendary neighborhood leader. “I wanted to be tough like him, and stay calm and laughing when things got dangerous. I wanted to be the toughest street-fighter and the most respected hood on our side of the river.” But gradually Rusty-James begins to comprehend how dreadfully alienated his brother is: “For some reason or other the Motorcycle Boy was alone, more alone than I would ever be, than I could even imagine being. He was living in a glass bubble and watching the world from it....He didn’t belong—anywhere—and what was worse, he didn’t want to.” Tragically, when the Motorcycle Boy dies, Rusty-James—the boy who always wanted desperately to belong, to be loved, to be not alone—suddenly steps into his brother’s shoes, afflicted with the Motorcycle Boy’s color-blindness and temporary deafness and alienation. He has become just like his brother: “I was in a glass bubble and everyone else was outside it and I’d be alone like that for the rest of my life.” Five years later, when Steve runs into him, Rusty-James is still remote and detached, unable to “think of someplace to go,” just as the Motorcycle Boy had failed to find anyplace for himself in society.)*

### Questions 9-11 (Critical Level)

9. What aspects of the Motorcycle Boy’s character are symbolized by his color-blindness, his nickname, and the rumble fish?

*(The color-blindness represents the Motorcycle Boy’s bleak, monochromatic view of the world. He sees things in black and white; he can’t compromise, accept the flawed reality of life, and find a place for himself within it. The fact that the Motorcycle Boy goes through life without using a real name emphasizes his total alienation. Each rumble fish is just like the Motorcycle Boy: living in [trapped in] a glass bubble, looking out at the world but not connecting with it.)*

10. How does the author’s writing style in this novel reflect Rusty-James’s world?

*(Although the action is fast-paced and the dialogue is authentic, the overall style is flat and colorless, which reflects the drab, dingy, colorless neighborhood that forms Rusty-James’s world. And since the story is told by the relatively unsophisticated and plain-talking Rusty-James, the narrative is straightforward and unembellished.)*

11. What instances of animal imagery do you find in the novel?

*(Examples may vary somewhat. Rusty-James says Steve has “a face like a real sincere rabbit,” thinks Steve looks “like a rabbit” up on the roof, and looks “like a sincere rabbit about to take on a pack of wolves” when he’s worried about his hospitalized mother. Rusty-James says the Motorcycle Boy “looked like a panther or something” and looks at their father “with that blank, expressionless animal face.” The magazine photograph makes the Motorcycle Boy “look like a wild animal out of the woods.” When Steve doesn’t like a remark the Motorcy-*



## RUMBLE FISH

cle Boy makes, he "glared at him—a rabbit scowling at a panther." During the mugging episode, Rusty-James compares himself to a dog: "I could feel the hairs of my neck starting to bristle, like a dog's" and "I tried to say something, but it came out in a grunt that sounded like a kicked dog." The Motorcycle Boy compares Rusty-James to a chameleon when they're in the X-rated movie theater. And in the end, the Motorcycle Boy is identified with the rumble fish in their glass bubbles.)

### Questions 12-14 (Creative Level)

12. Write a new Chapter 12 for the book in which Rusty-James narrates what happens after the police take him from the bridge to the hospital.
13. Describe what you think will happen in Rusty-James's life in the future.
14. Retell one of the novel's episodes from the Motorcycle Boy's point of view.

### ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

#### Art and Drama

1. Draw a map showing the locations of various settings of the novel, including important settings like Benny's, the pet store and the vacant lot behind it, the river and the bridge, Rusty-James's apartment, and downtown.
2. Create illustrations of the novel's characters, or come to class one day dressed as 1970s hoods and act out scenes from the novel.
3. The Motorcycle Boy tells Rusty-James, "It's a bit of a burden to be Robin Hood, Jesse James, and the Pied Piper." Create a skit that tells the story of one of these fabled characters, and act out your skit with classmates. Costumes would be a plus.
4. Design a cool car of the 1970s with flashy features like the simulated mags on the Chevy that caught Rusty-James's eye.

#### Education

1. Research and then participate in a class discussion about the pros and cons of tracking, an approach that is currently being challenged.
2. What is "new math"? Is it still taught? What do people object to about this approach to teaching mathematics? What do people like about it?

#### History and Social Studies

1. Create a flow chart showing the various elements of the juvenile justice and corrections system in your area. How would Rusty-James and the Motorcycle Boy (if he had lived) have been treated in this system?
2. On a map of the United States, plan the route you will take to travel to a coastal location that is quite a distance away from where you live. Decide what mode of transportation you will use.
3. Investigate the prevalence of gangs and gang activity in your locality. What programs are in place to deal with this problem?

#### Language Arts

1. Rewrite some of the novel's dialogue into correct English grammar. Does this still sound like actual teenagers' speech? Would Rusty-James and his friends speak this way?
2. Read some other S. E. Hinton novels, like *The Outsiders*, *Tex*, and *That Was Then, This Is Now*. In a small-

group or whole-class discussion or in writing, compare the various Hinton novels and identify common elements among them.

3. S. E. Hinton has been widely praised for the dialogue she writes for teens. Try your hand at writing dialogue for fictional teenagers. Use characters from this novel or another novel you're familiar with, or invent characters of your own.
4. In a book about Greek legends and mythology, learn more about the story of Cassandra and her gift of prophecy.
5. S. E. Hinton was just fifteen when she began writing her first novel. Find out about the sensation *The Outsiders* caused when it was first published in 1967.
6. Write a newspaper article about the shooting of the Motorcycle Boy and the arrest of Rusty-James.

#### Mathematics

1. Suppose you want to set up a home aquarium. Find out about the various systems, components, and types of fish available. Then figure out how much you could afford to spend on your home aquarium and make a detailed list of each item that you would select for your aquarium and its cost. Stay within your budget.
2. For your planned coastal trip (see Social Studies activities), figure out the number miles you'll travel and how many hours/days your trip will take. Also, calculate the various costs of traveling this route by bus, plane, train, car, and motorcycle.

#### Music

Listen to music of the late 1960s and 1970s. Which musicians and which music would Rusty-James, Steve, the Motorcycle Boy, Patty, and Smokey have liked best?

#### Science and Health

1. Demonstrate to the class proper first-aid techniques for treating the various types of injuries suffered by the novel's characters (including fracture, gash, possible wound infection, and head trauma).
2. Research and write an illustrated report on the effects of alcohol, amphetamines, depressants, and/or heroin on the human body.
3. Research and report on the symptoms, causes, effects, and treatment of stroke or color-blindness.
4. Report on a successful program somewhere near where you live to clean up a polluted body of water.

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Draw up a list of rules for playing pool, and explain to classmates how the game is played. If possible, demonstrate some pool shots or techniques.
2. This novel was first published in 1975. Does it seem dated to you, or do the problems that the novel's teenage characters have to deal with still exist for today's teens? Discuss this with classmates.
3. View the video of *Rumble Fish*, and then participate in a class discussion about the video as compared with the novel. Identify strengths and weaknesses of each, react to the portrayals of the various characters, talk about any plot variations, and evaluate the video's moody black-and-white ambience.
4. Collect Rusty-James's observations about himself and life to create a self-portrait of this young man. (For exam-

## RUMPLE FISH

ple, in Chapter 2, Rusty-James observes, "I can't think about two things at the same time" and "I get annoyed when people want to kill me for some stupid little reason. Something big, and I don't mind it so much.")

5. Put together a class display of images of motorcycles—current and/or vintage, on the street, off-road, racing, and so on. Or create a video of a motorcycle adventure.
6. Set up an aquarium somewhere in your school, or at home. If you decide you want some Siamese fighting fish, will you have to keep them in separate tanks?
7. During the mugging, Rusty-James has an out-of-body near-death experience. Read other people's descriptions of similar experiences, and share what you learn with classmates. What do you think is happening during these episodes?
8. Rusty-James goes to a free clinic for treatment of his head wound. Do any free clinics operate in your area? Whom do they treat? How are they staffed and paid for? Do they need volunteers?

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Draw up a list of the novel's main characters. Next to each name, note the person's physical appearance, character traits, and relationship with Rusty-James, and then summarize the part this person plays in the novel.
2. Create a court drama in which Rusty-James's court-appointed defense lawyer (or perhaps his father the former lawyer) defends Rusty-James by calling on witnesses who describe the boy's deprived upbringing and his true motivation for being at the pet store with the Motorcycle Boy.
3. Design settings and draw up a list of props for a stage or film version of the novel. Tell what will happen at each of these settings and how each prop fits into the action.
4. Explain how each of these elements of the typical S. E. Hinton novel is present in this book: troubled and tough male teenage narrator, absent adult authority figures, commonplace violence in the narrator's life, poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, antisocial behavior, superficial female characters, hostile environment, or an expressed need to belong.

### OTHER WORKS BY S. E. HINTON

*The Outsiders* (1967)  
*That Was Then, This Is Now* (1971)  
*Tex* (1979)  
*Taming the Star Runner* (1988)  
*Big David, Little David* (1994)  
*The Puppy Sister* (1995)

### RELATED READING

Anonymous, *Go Ask Alice*  
Frank Bonham, *Cool Cat and Durango Street*  
Lois McMaster Bujold, *Mirror Dance*  
F. Buss, *Journey of the Sparrows*  
A.E. Cannon, *The Shadow Brothers*  
Alice Childress, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich*  
Judith Ortiz Cofer, *An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio*  
Robert Cormier, *Beyond the Chocolate War, The Chocolate War, and We All Fall Down*  
John Donovan, *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip*  
Janet Campbell Hale, *The Owl's Song*  
Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

Robert Heinlein, *Farmer in the Sky; Have Spacesuit, Will Travel; Starman Jones; and Starship Troopers*  
Kristin Hunter, *The Soul Brothers and Sister Lou*  
Hadley Irwin, *Can't Hear You Listening*  
M.E. Kerr, *If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever? and The Son of Someone Famous*  
E.L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*  
Nat Hentoff, *I'm Really Dragged But Nothing Gets Me Down*  
Nancy Larrick, ed., *I Heard a Scream in the Street: Poetry by Young People in the City*  
Kevin Major, *Far From Shore*  
Sharon Mathis, *Teacup Full of Roses*  
Harry Mazer, *The War on Villa Street*  
Walter Dean Meyers, *Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff; Motown and Didi: A Love Story; Scorpions; and The Young Landlords*  
Jess Mowry, *Babylon Boyz*  
Theresa Nelson, *The Beggar's Ride*  
Scott O'Dell, *Child of Fire*  
Doris Orgel, *Crack in the Heart*  
Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*  
Larry Segrist, *Spacer Dreams*  
Charles Sheffield and Jerry Pournelle, *Higher Education*  
Gary Soto, *Buried Onions*  
John Rowe Townsend, *Trouble in the Jungle*  
Paul Zindel, *Confessions of a Teenage Baboon*

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Vol. 2. Detroit: Gale, 1989.  
*Booklist*, September 1, 1975, p. 41.  
*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, December 1975, p. 63.  
Chevalier, Tracy, ed. *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, 3d ed. Chicago/London: St. James Press, 1989.  
*Contemporary Authors*, New Revision Series, Vols. 32 & 62. Detroit: Gale, 1991, 1998.  
*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vols. 30 & 111. Detroit: Gale, 1984, 1999.  
Daly, Jay. *Presenting S. E. Hinton*. Twayne's United States Authors Series. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987.  
de Montreville, Doris, and Elizabeth D. Crawford, eds. *Fourth Book of Junior Authors and Illustrators*. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1978.  
Hinton, Susan. "Teenagers Are for Real." *New York Times Book Review*, August 27, 1967.  
*The Horn Book Magazine*, December 1975, p. 601.  
*School Library Journal*, October 1975, p. 106; December 1975, p. 31.  
*New York Times Book Review*, December 14, 1975, p. 8.  
*Publishers Weekly*, July 28, 1975, pp. 122-23  
Silvey, Anita, ed. *Children's Books and Their Creators*. Boston/NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.  
*Something About the Author*, Vol. 58. Detroit: Gale, 1990.  
*Times Literary Supplement*, April 2, 1976, p. 388.  
**Internet**  
"Authors and Illustrators Index: S. E. Hinton": <[www.randomhouse.com/teachersbdd/sehi.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachersbdd/sehi.html)>  
"Books by S. E. Hinton": <[www.cix.co.uk/~asc/trapped/author60.htm](http://www.cix.co.uk/~asc/trapped/author60.htm)>  
"Contemporary Literary Criticism": <[galenet.gale.com](http://galenet.gale.com)>

## RUMPLE FISH

"Francis Ford Coppola Presents Rumble Fish":

<<http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Lounge/2483/>>

"Rumble Fish":

<[www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/6300183297/hasbinizwepliboo/102-6004708-602772](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/6300183297/hasbinizwepliboo/102-6004708-602772)>

"S. E. Hinton": <[falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/hinton.htm](http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/hinton.htm)>

"S. E. Hinton: A Bibliography": <[falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/hintonbib.htm](http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/hintonbib.htm)>

## ANSWER KEY

### VOCABULARY TEST

- |      |       |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. a  | 11. b | 16. s |
| 2. q | 7. d  | 12. o | 17. f |
| 3. e | 8. g  | 13. r | 18. m |
| 4. p | 9. n  | 14. j | 19. k |
| 5. i | 10. t | 15. l | 20. h |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |      |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. e | 3. g | 5. d | 7. i | 9. f |
|------|------|------|------|------|

#### Part II: Fill-In (20 points)

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. pool       | 6. wrist    |
| 2. vacant lot | 7. mother   |
| 3. gangs      | 8. dumb     |
| 4. rep        | 9. lawyer   |
| 5. river      | 10. Siamese |

#### Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- |                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. junior high             | 9. hearing                |
| 2. side                    | 10. glass bowl            |
| 3. turning in perfect test | 11. fourteen              |
| 4. trash                   | 12. the police            |
| 5. a party at the lake     | 13. rabbit                |
| 6. skin flick              | 14. expulsion from school |
| 7. father                  | 15. math                  |
| 8. ocean                   |                           |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. f | 6. c  |
| 2. i | 7. g  |
| 3. a | 8. h  |
| 4. j | 9. b  |
| 5. e | 10. d |

#### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Benny's      | 6. California   |
| 2. pet store    | 7. alcohol      |
| 3. Steve (Hays) | 8. hubcaps      |
| 4. the river    | 9. S. E. Hinton |
| 5. knife        | 10. colors      |

#### Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

- |                   |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1. apartment      | 9. Patty            |
| 2. poker          | 10. panther         |
| 3. gym            | 11. the reformatory |
| 4. kill someone   | 12. seventeen       |
| 5. the government | 13. dark red        |
| 6. Cleveland High | 14. mother          |
| 7. downtown       | 15. free clinic     |
| 8. head           |                     |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

## RUMPLE FISH

### VOCABULARY TEST

Match each underlined word with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- |                    |                               |                 |           |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| a. very odd        | f. continue firmly            | k. clearly      | p. madman |
| b. stubbornly      | g. talking disrespectfully to | l. necessary    | q. annoy  |
| c. associates      | h. with great anxiety         | m. twisted      | r. flat   |
| d. very offensive  | i. with angry contempt        | n. other choice | s. inborn |
| e. slight coloring | j. moral fault                | o. judging      | t. drink  |

- \_\_\_ 1. "Even back when we was rumblin', we never fought Biff's gang. They was allies."
- \_\_\_ 2. He should have known better than to pester me when I'm mad.
- \_\_\_ 3. Gradually I started to calm down, and the red tinge to everything went away.
- \_\_\_ 4. Biff stood a few feet away from me, laughing like a maniac.
- \_\_\_ 5. "Go to the hospital for this?" I said scornfully. "This ain't nothin'."
- \_\_\_ 6. Steve's parents were kind of weird. They never let him do anything.
- \_\_\_ 7. He was mouthy just to get on people's nerves. A real obnoxious kid.
- \_\_\_ 8. Mr. Harrigan went on to list all the things I'd been sent to the office for that year: fighting, swearing, smoking, sassing the teacher....
- \_\_\_ 9. "The alternative to suspension is the Youth Detention Center."
- \_\_\_ 10. "Here, take a swig of this," I said to Steve as we went across the bridge.
- \_\_\_ 11. "You can't stand your father drinking all the time," Steve went on doggedly. "So why do you?"
- \_\_\_ 12. I just stood there, gauging the distances, the numbers, the weapons, like the Motorcycle Boy had taught me to, a long time ago.
- \_\_\_ 13. The Motorcycle Boy had a funny voice for somebody as big as he was—kind of toneless, light and cold.
- \_\_\_ 14. "Well, remember," the Motorcycle Boy said, "loyalty is Rusty-James's only vice."
- \_\_\_ 15. "Apparently it is essential to some people to belong—anywhere."
- \_\_\_ 16. "Even the most primitive societies have an innate respect for the insane."
- \_\_\_ 17. "People will persist in joining things. You'll see the gangs come back."
- \_\_\_ 18. Since getting clobbered, everything even *looked* funny, like I was seeing things through distorted glass.
- \_\_\_ 19. "Your mother," my father said distinctly, "is not crazy."
- \_\_\_ 20. "Look, you need some money? I'll get you some money," I said desperately to the Motorcycle Boy.

## RUMPLE FISH

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number. Use each name only once.

- |                                                                           |                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ___ 1. An ally and rival who takes Rusty-James's girl and top-cat status. | a. Rusty-James          |
| ___ 2. Owner of the pet store.                                            | b. the Motorcycle Boy   |
| ___ 3. Person who is planning to live in a tree house.                    | c. Steve Hays           |
| ___ 4. Rusty-James's older brother, an alienated loner.                   | d. Biff Wilcox          |
| ___ 5. Person who says he's going to kill Rusty-James.                    | e. Smokey Bennet        |
| ___ 6. Rusty-James's best friend.                                         | f. Rusty-James's father |
| ___ 7. Substitute teacher who yearns for the Motorcycle Boy.              | g. Rusty-James's mother |
| ___ 8. A former gang member who spends five years in the reformatory.     | h. Patty                |
| ___ 9. An alcoholic whose wife deserted him.                              | i. Cassandra            |
| ___ 10. Bleached blonde who switches boyfriends.                          | j. Mr. Dobson           |

#### Part II: Fill-In (20 points)

Write one or two words in each blank to make each statement true.

1. Rusty-James and his friends play \_\_\_\_\_ at Benny's in their leisure time.
2. Biff and Rusty-James fight in a \_\_\_\_\_ behind the pet store.
3. Rusty-James misses the bonding and togetherness he got from the \_\_\_\_\_ that have disbanded.
4. Rusty-James gets his \_\_\_\_\_ by being a tough guy; Steve gets his by being Rusty-James's best friend.
5. The Motorcycle Boy always stays and stares at the \_\_\_\_\_ when he crosses it.
6. The Motorcycle Boy stops the fight when he breaks Biff's \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The Motorcycle Boy travels to California to visit his \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Rusty-James says he is always assigned to \_\_\_\_\_ classes.
9. Rusty-James's father used to earn his living as a \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The "rumble fish" are actually \_\_\_\_\_ fighting fish.

## RUMPLE FISH

### Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. Rusty-James and his friends attend (senior high, junior high, Catholic school, reform school).
2. Biff slashes Rusty-James in the (gut, back, head, side) with a knife.
3. The Motorcycle Boy says he was expelled from school for (cheating, fighting, turning in perfect tests, cutting classes).
4. The river in Rusty-James's neighborhood is full of (fish, kayaks, trash, islands).
5. After Rusty-James goes to (a party at the lake, a skin flick, a fight with Biff, California), Patty breaks up with him.
6. On their evening out, Rusty-James, Steve, and the Motorcycle Boy watch part of a (pit bull fight, strip tease, drug bust, skin flick).
7. Steve is physically abused by his (older brother, father, uncle, mother).
8. In the novel's opening scene, Steve and Rusty-James run into each other by the (ocean, river, lake, pool hall).
9. The Motorcycle Boy's sense of (sight, smell, hearing, touch) sometimes disappears.
10. Rusty-James feels that he and the Motorcycle Boy both live inside a(n) (dark mirror, jail cell, underground tunnel, glass bowl).
11. During the main events of the novel, Rusty-James is (twelve, fourteen, sixteen, seventeen) years old.
12. The Motorcycle Boy is killed by (a hit man, rival gang members, his father, the police).
13. Rusty-James thinks Steve looks like a (panther, dog, chameleon, rabbit).
14. After he cuts morning classes yet again, Rusty-James is punished by (a week's detention, a week's suspension, expulsion from school, canceled vacations).
15. The only class in school that Steve takes with Rusty-James is (math, English, chemistry, history).

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. How does Rusty-James feel about being home alone? Why does he feel this way?
2. Describe the relationship between Rusty-James and Steve.
3. Explain the novel's title, and explain how the rumble fish and the Motorcycle Boy are alike.

## RUMPLE FISH

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each quotation. In the list below, find the character who speaks the words. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the quotation number. Use each name only once.

- a. Rusty-James      c. Steve Hays      e. Smokey Bennet      g. Officer Patterson      i. Cassandra  
b. the Motorcycle Boy      d. Biff Wilcox      f. Rusty-James's father      h. Patty      j. Mr. Harrigan

- \_\_\_\_ 1. "What strange lives you two lead."  
\_\_\_\_ 2. "I'm not hooked. I just thought it might help. I thought he was gone for good."  
\_\_\_\_ 3. "I think that I'm gonna look just like him when I get older. Whadd'ya think?"  
\_\_\_\_ 4. "We have decided that we can no longer tolerate your kind of behavior."  
\_\_\_\_ 5. "Rusty-James, if there was still gangs around here, I'd be president, not you."  
\_\_\_\_ 6. "I got to think for myself, I can't keep on thinking for you, too."  
\_\_\_\_ 7. "Shock, hell. He's probably on dope or something."  
\_\_\_\_ 8. "I heard all about you and that girl, that black-haired tramp."  
\_\_\_\_ 9. "Rumble fish. They'd kill each other if they could. Wonder if they'd act that way in the river."  
\_\_\_\_ 10. "Take a swing at you? I'm gonna cut you to ribbons."

#### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Write a one- or two-word answer to each of the following questions.

1. What is the name of the local pool hall where Rusty-James and his friends hang out? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What local business does the Motorcycle Boy break into? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Who is Rusty-James's best friend? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Where does the Motorcycle Boy try to take the rumble fish to? \_\_\_\_\_
5. With what weapon does Biff seriously wound Rusty-James? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What U.S. state does the Motorcycle Boy go to in order to visit with his mother? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What substance is Rusty-James's father addicted to? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What four items does Rusty-James steal and hand to Steve? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Who is the author of this novel? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What part of the world is the Motorcycle Boy unable to see? \_\_\_\_\_

## RUMPLE FISH

### Part III: Multiple Choice (30 points)

Underline the choice that correctly completes each of these sentences.

1. Rusty-James lives in a(n) (house, apartment, condo, public housing project) with his father and brother.
2. Because Rusty-James can't hide what he's thinking and feeling, he's terrible at playing (pool, football, poker, chess).
3. Sympathetic Mr. Ryan is Rusty-James's (gym, English, math, chemistry) teacher.
4. The Motorcycle Boy was once offered \$400 to (leave town, steal a bike, beat up the school's principal, kill someone).
5. Rusty-James's father gets the money he lives on from (his law practice, dealing dope, the government, the Motorcycle Boy).
6. When Rusty-James is expelled, the guidance counselor tells him he now has to attend (Cleveland High, counseling sessions, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, juvenile delinquent work sessions).
7. Rusty-James is very excited about going (to the lake, to a dance, to the drag races, downtown) with Steve and the Motorcycle Boy one night.
8. The muggers seriously wound Rusty-James in the (side, head, gut, back).
9. (Cassandra, Angela, Patty, Jamie) is Rusty-James's girlfriend.
10. Rusty-James thinks the Motorcycle Boy resembles a (dog, panther, chameleon, rabbit).
11. After the Motorcycle Boy is killed, Rusty-James spends the next five years at (the state prison, the reformatory, a psychiatric hospital, a foster home).
12. The Motorcycle Boy is (fourteen, sixteen, seventeen, nineteen) when he dies.
13. Rusty-James and the Motorcycle Boy both have hair that is (dark red, very blonde, black, prematurely gray).
14. Steve is very upset because his (mother, father, little sister, older brother) is very sick in the hospital.
15. When he is seriously hurt, Rusty-James goes to the (hospital, emergency room, free clinic, school nurse).

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. What role did the gang play in Rusty-James's life? How does he feel about the death of gangs and gang activity?
2. Describe the relationship between Rusty-James and the Motorcycle Boy.
3. What does Steve mean when he tells Rusty-James, "You're just like a ball in a pinball machine, getting slammed back and forth"?



**THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY**

PERMA-BOUND BOOKS • 617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650

Toll Free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169

E-mail: [books@perma-bound.com](mailto:books@perma-bound.com)

PERMA-BOUND CANADA • Box 517, Station A • Willowdale, Ontario M2N 5T1

Toll Free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-888-250-3811

E-mail: [perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca](mailto:perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca)

VISIT OUR WEB SITE: <http://www.perma-bound.com>