

LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE

MASSACHUSETTS LEVEL III HONORABLE MENTION 2009

Dear S.E. Hinton,

Gang violence, theft, vandalism – these are things that people associate with my city. Just like the Greasers, my city gets a bad reputation from the small amount of trouble that occurs and gets no credit for all the good people that live there. When one thinks of Revere, Massachusetts, they think of huge gang battles and killings, like that's all that occurs here. In reality, I've never seen either of those things in my lifetime. In *The Outsiders* the Socs view the Greasers in the same way, which leads to big misunderstandings and stereotypes without any real base. Your novel *The Outsiders* really hits the nail on the head in terms of where I live and people that I know. Although I was never in any gang or group of friends like the Greasers, I live amongst those types of things every single day and the lessons and morals present in *The Outsiders* are things that I reference every day.

In your novel the Greasers and the Socs fight each other just because one is more advantaged than the other and simply because neither side knows anything about each other's lives. The Greasers come to find out that the Socs have to deal with just as many problems as they do, and they come to find that they aren't that different after all. The city I live in has sort of the same problems. There are many different gangs and "cliques" that fight each other physically and verbally nearly every day. They have no reason to fight each other, and if you asked any given member of any gang, I don't think that they could give you a reason either. Over the course of my education, I have come across many different types of people from all different groups. One guy in particular that I went to school with, we'll call him Jim, was a really great kid. He was smart, funny, and an amazing artist. However, he was wrapped up in gang life, so people only saw him as that gangster on the corner. He had tons of potential, but it was all for naught because he let the gang life control him. It's a shame that no one ever told *him* to "stay gold."

The biggest lesson to be learned from your novel is not to judge a book by its cover. The Socs saw the Greasers as a rag tag group of hoodlums who like to cause commotion. They had no idea that the Greasers were actually a good group of kids who got a lot of problems thrown at them. The Greasers on the other hand thought that the Socs were just a bunch of preppy, snobby kids who had not a care in the world. However, they come to find out that even the Socs themselves had problems of their own that they needed to deal with, and their lives aren't so perfect after all. This is exactly the case with my city. I once mentioned that I was from Revere and a man replied, "Revere...you gotta fight for your life down there!" And one of my friends had a similar encounter that ended in "Don't you guys shoot cops in Revere?" We instantly get tagged with all of the bad things that the gang violence has caused here, and it is a shame. For example, my sister plays soccer for a youth league, and they went to a "richer" city and they wouldn't let them play because the parents of the other team feared for their children's safety.

As a comparison, you could say that my entire city is "The Greasers," and the richer, more "privileged" cities are the Socs. Although our cities don't necessarily "fight" each other, unless you count sports competitions, other cities still look down on people from Revere simply because a few people gave us all a bad reputation. In reality, there are a ton of truly great people in Revere. In fact, our sports teams have even won sportsmanship awards and other things that most people do not know about or choose to ignore.

The Outsiders is a very good representation of the real life issues having to do with people's perspective of the city I live in. The Greasers are misunderstood; they are not necessarily bad kids. The same goes with people from Revere: yes, there may be the typical street scum, but every city has problems like that of their own. People from "richer" cities focus so much on the bad, such as how the Socs view the Greasers, that they forget to realize that there are good, respectable people here just as they have there.

The stereotypes about my city annoy me, so I try my best to do my small part in remedying them. For example, at track meets I always shake my opponents' hands before and after, win or lose. I never "talk crap" at my football games, and I have never committed a crime or even gotten in a fight for that matter. *The Outsiders* made me realize that I don't want to be labeled as a "street thug" for the rest of my life, and that it's a shame that good kids like the Greasers get a bad reputation for just trying to survive.

Sincerely,

Victor

Victor Galli
Revere High School
Grade 12