

S. E. Hinton



Susan Eloise Hinton was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1950 and has lived there most of her life. The fact that she has come to be known as S.E. Hinton speaks to the author's remarkable identification with her audience. Hinton, famous for her novels about troubled young men, tried to conceal her female identity so she would not alienate her male readers.

Hinton says she began writing soon after she started reading. For many years, she concentrated on writing about cowboys and horses. She even completed two books about her favorite passion.

But the troubling clashes between greasers and Socs that Hinton witnessed during her teen years eventually forced its way into her writing. Though she was neither greaser nor Soc herself, Hinton personally knew teens from both groups. It was the beating of one of her greaser friends that inspired *The Outsiders*.

The Outsiders was Hinton's attempt to prove that the greasers were human, sensitive youths, deserving understanding and even respect. At the same time, Hinton wanted to show that, despite their money and social status, the Socs also faced problems.

Hinton began *The Outsiders* when she was fifteen. At the same time she was composing the book, she received a D in her creative writing class. But, undiscouraged, Hinton continued writing.

To gain the necessary background for her subject, Hinton read everything she could find on juvenile delinquency. But she also explored the greasers' world firsthand. Her passport into their territory was a long jackknife she carried. Fascinated by the knife, the boys would fall into conversations with Hinton and reveal their escapades, problems and frustrations. Hinton made a similar exploration of the Socs' world, though she often found the Socs' masks of coolness hard to penetrate.

The Outsiders was published when Hinton was seventeen. It was an instant bestseller and won Hinton the praise of critics and readers alike for insightful, honest depiction of teens' emotions.

The success of the book enabled Hinton to enroll in the University of Tulsa. She graduated from there with a B.S. in education in 1970. In September of the same year, she married David Inhofe, a student she met at the university.

It was her husband who encouraged Hinton to write her next book. She completed *That Was Then*,

This Is Now in just four months' time. The book was published in 1971, and once again, Hinton was praised by readers and reviewers. *Rumble Fish* (1975) and *Tex* (1979) followed. All three novels received honors from the American Library Association, as well as other awards. The appeal of Hinton's work was further demonstrated when her books were adapted as movies.

So far, Hinton has remained committed in her writing to a young adult audience. Her novels usually spotlight delinquent teens in troubled family and social relations. Her protagonists are at the same time dreaming idealists and cold realists, trying to cope with the pressures of maturing while maintaining their own identity. Her stories are all the more direct from being told in the simple, frank, but often poetic voice of her protagonists.

The impact of Hinton's message and style has been widespread and long-lasting. She introduced a new era in young adult fiction by realistically but sympathetically revealing the problems of teens trying to cope in a rough, unsettled world. Critics have applauded and imitators have followed. But it is Hinton's worldwide audience of devoted fans that remains her greatest tribute.