Rumble Fish Study Guide

Rumble Fish by S. E. Hinton

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Introduction

S. E. Hinton's third novel, *Rumble Fish* (1975), is similar to her first two novels, *The Outsiders* and *That Was Then, This Is Now*, in that it stars a troubled teenager from a precarious background and is told from a young man's point of view. However, it's different from the two previous books because they both featured teenagers who were more intelligent and sensitive than their peers and who were wiser by the end of the book. In contrast, in *Rumble Fish* Rusty James is a victim of circumstance in a story that does not provide much hope for his future.

Like Hinton's other books, this novel helped to shape the young adult genre, moving it toward realism and away from the wholesome, overly nice story lines that had prevailed before Hinton began writing her gritty tales. Hinton's style has been widely imitated by other writers since her debut in 1967.

The book was an ALA Best Book for Young Adults in 1975, was listed as one of the Best Books of the Year by *School Library Journal* in 1975, and won a Land of Enchantment Book Award from the New Mexico Library Association in 1982. In 1988, Hinton was awarded the Margaret A. Edwards Award for her body of work.

Author Biography

Susan Eloise Hinton was born in 1950 (some sources say 1948) in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Her first book, *The Outsiders*, was published when she was seventeen. A tomboy, Hinton wrote the book because the teen books then available were too wholesome and sweet for her tastes. The novel deals with rivalry between students of different social classes, poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, and teenage angst. Because the main character was male, her editors urged her to conceal her own gender by using her initials instead of her full name.

Hinton began writing the book during her sophomore year. She didn't think of publishing it until the mother of one of her schoolmates, who was a professional children's writer, took a look at it and told Hinton to send it to her agent. Hinton did, and the novel was accepted for publication on the night of her high school graduation.

Publication of the book brought intense attention to Hinton, who was busy studying education at the University of Tulsa, marrying her husband, David Inhofe, and having a family. Four years later, she published another book, *That Was Then, This Is Now*, another story of troubled youth. *Rumble Fish* came out in 1975, and *Tex* was published in 1979. Her fifth young adult book, *Taming the Star Runner*, was published in 1988. She has also written two books for younger readers.

Despite her relatively small number of titles, Hinton's work has had a major impact on literature for children, helping to shape the direction of young adult literature by moving it toward less idealized, more realistic portrayals of the lives of teenagers. Certainly, she has struck a nerve among young readers, who respond to her depictions of their peers and their emotional pain.

In 1988, Hinton was honored with the Margaret A. Edwards Award for career achievement. Over ten million copies of her books are in print, and films have been made of four of her novels.

Plot Summary

Chapter One

The novel opens five or six years after the main action, as Rusty James runs into his old friend Steve, whom he hasn't seen in all that time. They are on the beach, far from the original action. Rusty James has been "bumming around," not working since getting out of the reformatory after serving five years, and Steve is on vacation from college, where he's studying to become a high school teacher. Steve invites Rusty James to dinner, an invitation he has no intention of accepting. Steve is too much of a reminder of some bad times.

Chapter Two

This chapter begins six years earlier, when the boys were around thirteen and fourteen. Rusty James is in Benny's, a local hangout, when a kid named Midget informs him that Biff Wilcox is out to kill him because of something Rusty James said to Biff's girlfriend. Rusty James arranges to meet Biff in the vacant lot behind a pet store, and both plan to bring friends. Although gang wars are supposedly a thing of the past—a ban enforced by Rusty James's older brother, the Motorcycle Boy—the Motorcycle Boy has disappeared and Rusty James says he's going to fight if he has to and he's not going to get caught without any backup.

Chapter Three

Rusty James goes to see his girlfriend, Patty. She's mad at him because she heard that he went up to the lake with Smokey and his cousin and some girls, but he tells her nothing happened, and they settle down to make out. She's nervous about his upcoming fight with Biff Wilcox and reminds him that he promised to quit fighting. However, she can't say much because she once went after another girl with a broken bottle because the girl was flirting with Rusty James.

He leaves her and goes back to Benny's, where a lot of kids are waiting for him. Steve is not there. He goes to the empty lot with Smokey and another friend, B. J. Biff and five other guys are there, and Biff is high on something, making him look and act crazy. Biff also has a knife, and Rusty James is armed only with a bike chain. They fight, and Rusty James wins. In the middle of the fight, the Motorcycle Boy shows up, saying, "I thought we'd stopped this cowboys and Indians crap." Rusty James is distracted by this, and Biff grabs the knife off the ground and slices Rusty James down his side. Steve shows up and tells Rusty James he should go to the hospital, but Rusty James refuses.

The Motorcycle Boy says he's been in California but says little about the trip. They go home, and Motorcycle Boy pours wine over the knife cut to sterilize it.

Chapter Four

The next day, Rusty James goes to school despite his wound. He misses math, plays poker during lunch, and stands out of gym, where the coach offers him five dollars to beat up another kid who's been giving the coach trouble. After school, Rusty James goes to Benny's, where all the kids are impressed with his knife cut. Steve comes in and says his mother is sick in the hospital. Rusty James leaves and steals some hubcaps, and when the owner and some friends chase him, he jumps from one roof to the next, urging Steve to do the same. Steve does, almost falling two stories down, and it turns out that the pursuers have given up and the leap wasn't necessary. Rusty James passes out from his wound, the running, and lack of food, frightening Steve, who begins crying.

Chapter Five

They both go home. Rusty James runs into Cassandra, who has a crush on the Motorcycle Boy. She is college educated and from a wealthy family, but she has moved to their part of town and has become a drug addict. Rusty James finds the Motorcycle Boy at home, takes care of his wound, and their father comes home, less drunk than usual. He is a mild man, who reads a lot when he isn't drinking, but he's completely detached from his sons' lives. Rusty James doesn't hate him but doesn't like him either. Smokey comes by around midnight with his cousin, and they go to the lake and hang out with some girls and drink. When he gets home, his father mentions that a policeman is out to get him, the Motorcycle Boy, or both of them. The next day, Rusty James skips school and sleeps until noon.

Chapter Six

That afternoon, Rusty James gets expelled from school for skipping class, fighting, swearing, arguing with teachers, and so forth. The guidance counselor, Mr. Harrigan, tells Rusty James that he will be transferred to Cleveland High, where all the "bad" kids are sent. Rusty James doesn't want to go there because Biff Wilcox and his group run that school. The alternative is the Youth Detention Center. Rusty James knows that a lot of paperwork must be done before anyone can come after him, so he decides to take his chances in the meantime. He goes to Patty's, but she's mad at him because she's heard that he was up at the lake with some girls, and she dumps him. He's upset but can't cry. He finds the Motorcycle Boy, and they arrange to go to the other side of the river that night. The Motorcycle Boy shows Rusty James a magazine that has the Motorcycle Boy's picture in it, taken when he was in California.

Chapter Seven

They go across the bridge that night, to a honky-tonk area. Steve comes along and, surprisingly, takes a drink when Rusty James offers it. They go to a porn movie but leave when a pervert in the men's bathroom accosts Steve. The Motorcycle Boy tells Rusty James that he saw their mother when he was out in California and also tells Rusty James that when Rusty James was two, he was left alone in the house for three days when his mother left and his father went on a drinking binge. Rusty James is nonplussed by this, not really grasping its connection to his present fear of being alone.

Rusty James and Steve wander around, making a little trouble, and end up at a party where they drink some more.

Chapter Eight

Later they end up in a bar, where they drink some more. When they leave, two guys mug them, but the Motorcycle Boy shows up just in time. Rusty James has a head injury, and Steve is scared to death.

Chapter Nine

The next day, Rusty James's head hurts so much that he decides to visit a free clinic, but when the doctor says he has to be admitted to the hospital, he flees to Steve's house, where Steve has been beaten up by his father for staying out drinking all night. Rusty James tells Steve they should both follow the Motorcycle Boy around for a while, but they can't think of a good reason. Clearly, Rusty James is afraid of being abandoned if the Motorcycle Boy disappears again. Steve refuses, angering Rusty James, who grabs him. Rusty James is startled to realize that now, like the Motorcycle Boy's, his hearing is gone. Steve says, "I've tried to help you, but I've got to think about myself some." He also says, "You better let go of Motorcycle Boy. If you're around him very long you won't believe in anything." This is the last time Rusty James sees Steve for many years.

Chapter Ten

Rusty James spends the rest of the day in Benny's, waiting for the Motorcycle Boy to show up. Patty comes in, ignores him, and sits with Smokey. Rusty James and Smokey go outside, and Smokey confesses that he set things up so that Patty would think Rusty James was cheating on her with the girls up at the lake. Smokey also says, "If there were gangs around here, I'd be president, not you." Surprisingly, Rusty James doesn't bother to fight back against either of these insults. He quietly agrees to let Smokey have Patty and the leadership of the group. If he wants to "keep his rep," he would have to fight Smokey, and he's in no shape to do that now, either physically or emotionally.

B. J. tells Rusty James that the Motorcycle Boy is in the pet store looking at fish. Rusty James finds him there. The fish are Siamese fighting fish, brilliantly colored; they are "rumble fish" that would kill each other if they were put in the same tank. "If you leaned a mirror against the bowl they'd kill themselves fighting their own reflection," the Motorcycle Boy says. They leave, and the store owner closes up.

Chapter Eleven

That night, the Motorcycle Boy and Rusty James go back to the pet store and steal the fish, which the Motorcycle Boy wants to release in the river. The Motorcycle Boy lets out all the animals in the store and heads to the river with the fish. The cop who's been trying to get him and Rusty James, Officer Patterson, shoots the Motorcycle Boy without warning, and he dies, as do the fish, who are too far from the river when the Motorcycle Boy falls and drops their bowl. Rusty James is arrested and notices that, like the

Motorcycle Boy, he is now also color-blind. The red flashing light on top of the police car is gray. He slams his fists through the window of the police car and slashes his wrists on the shards.

Chapter Twelve

With this chapter, the action moves forward five or six years to the time when the book started. Steve tells Rusty James that he made up his mind to get out of their bad neighborhood, and he did, never looking back. He tells Rusty James, "If you want to go somewhere in life you just have to work till you make it." Rusty James replies, "Yeah. It'll be nice when I can think of someplace to go." They are on totally different wavelengths, and even though Steve invites Rusty James for dinner, Rusty James knows he won't go, because Steve is too much of a reminder of the past. "I figured if I didn't see him, I'd start forgetting again. But it's been taking me a lot longer than I thought it would," he says.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Rusty-James is sitting on the beach when he runs into Steve Hays, an old friend from back home. It has been five or six years since Rusty-James has seen Steve, who is going to college now to become a teacher. It takes a while for Rusty-James to recognize him; he says his memory is messed up. He has been bumming around on the beach with his friend Alex since he got out of the reformatory, where he spent five years.

Steve notices the scar running down Rusty-James' side and Rusty-James tells him he got it in a knife fight. Steve says he knows; he was there. For a second, Rusty-James remembers the fight, like a movie.

Steve says they should meet for dinner; he wants Rusty-James to meet his girlfriend. Rusty-James does not stop him from naming a time and place, though he does not much want to talk about the good old days. When Steve asks him if he knows who Rusty-James reminds him of, Rusty-James remembers everything. He thinks he could have been glad to see Steve, if he had not made him remember everything.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Rumble Fish is told using a *frame*—a story in which the main story happens in the past and is introduced and concluded by chapters set in the present. Chapter 1 sets up the frame, introducing the main character, Rusty-James, in the present, as he runs into his old friend Steve on the beach, far from where the main story takes place.

A frame serves two purposes in a story. The first is to introduce an element of suspense, by making readers curious about the references to the past. In *Rumble Fish*, we learn in the first chapter that Rusty-James was badly cut in a knife fight. The mention of the knife fight is a promise by the author, S. E. Hinton, to describe it when the time is right. Furthermore, we know Rusty-James ended up in a reformatory for five years, which probably resulted from the events we are about to see. Rusty-James also reminds Steve of someone, though we do not yet learn whom. This seems even more significant than the knife fight or the reformatory, since it is a subtle indication of how Rusty-James has changed because of the events in the story.

Another purpose of a frame story, particularly when used with a first-person narrator, is to provide some distance between the narrator and the events of the past. As time passes after an event, we tend to gain perspective of it, so that when we tell the story much later, we can help the audience—and ourselves—make better sense of what happened. This is why, in many frame stories, the first-person narrator is an older, wiser person looking back at the past. However, in *Rumble Fish*, the fact that Rusty-James has problems with his memory, and that he resents Steve for making him remember what happened, tells us that Rusty-James, the first-person narrator, probably is no wiser

than he was when the events happened five or six years ago. Rather, we can expect him to relive those events as if they happened yesterday and perhaps to have no better understanding of them than he did at the time they happened. This is just one element that makes *Rumble Fish* such a tragic story.

Rusty-James' bad memory seems as much a result of his desire to avoid the past as it is of any injury he might have suffered. Using slang and bad grammar, S. E. Hinton economically sets up Rusty-James' character as a tough guy, a beach bum not long out of the reformatory, who nevertheless hasn't changed much since he entered it. This contrasts sharply with the character of Steve, who is on vacation from college, where he is studying to become a teacher, and adds to the element of sadness present in the story from the very beginning. By the end of the first chapter, we know this will not be a story with a successful conclusion.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

It is six years earlier, and Rusty-James is fourteen. He is playing pool at Benny's, the hangout for junior high kids, when Midget, a tall, skinny kid, runs in to tell him that Biff Wilcox is looking to kill him. It's over something Rusty-James said to Biff's girlfriend Anita, which their friends B.J. and Smokey agree was true, though it turns Steve and Midget red to hear it.

Rusty-James is annoyed Biff wants to kill him for such a stupid reason—if it were something big, he would not mind so much. He gets some chocolate milk from the counter and sits down with Midget. Everyone else gathers around. Midget tells Rusty-James that Biff wants to meet him in the vacant lot behind the pet store. Smokey says Biff probably will not come alone, and Rusty-James says he will not, either. Steve warns him that everyone could get into it then, but Rusty-James says he and Biff will settle things themselves, but he is not going without backup.

Steve is worried about a gang fight, which has not happened in years. Steve is fourteen, like Rusty-James, but he acts forty, and is always cautious about things. If Steve were not his best friend, Rusty-James would not let him get away with saying the stuff he does. Unlike the others, Steve does not have a reputation to protect, so Rusty-James tells him he does not have to go. Steve tells him he will be there, but he starts to remind Rusty-James what Motorcycle Boy said about gang fighting. Rusty-James cuts him off angrily. He says Motorcycle Boy has been gone for two weeks.

The others start talking about Biff's gang, who used to be their allies, and Rusty-James tunes out, thinking about how he is going to fight Biff. Then he hears someone talking about when the Motorcycle Boy gets back, and Rusty-James slams his fist on the table. He says he does not know when Motorcycle Boy is coming back, if he is coming back. He walks out, slamming the door behind him.

Steve follows him out, and they walk to the bridge while Rusty-James smokes a cigarette and cools off. Steve keeps quiet for a few minutes, knowing better than to pester Rusty-James when he is mad. Once, Steve pestered him when he should not have, and Rusty-James punched the wind out of him.

They look out over the bridge, where Motorcycle Boy used to watch the river. It is filled with trash, and Rusty-James tosses in his cigarette butt. Steve says the neighborhood is crummy, and one day he is going to get out, but Rusty-James does not see any point in thinking about the future. Steve tells him he has been acting funny ever since Motorcycle Boy left, and he has to accept the fact that Motorcycle Boy might not come back. Rusty-James says he does not have to accept anything. Steve reminds him of a rabbit he saw at the zoo once, a sincere rabbit. He is smart, but he worries everything,

and Rusty-James wonders why Steve is his best friend. Rusty-James thinks that for a tough kid, he has a bad habit of getting attached to people.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2 begins the main story, the events of the past being remembered by Rusty-James. He is fourteen, but the toughest guy in the neighborhood, not afraid to use his fists when challenged, as he is by Biff Wilcox. In this chapter, we get a complete picture of Rusty-James as a character. Though old for his age, hanging out in pool halls and leading the physical violence in the streets, he is also oddly childlike, ordering chocolate milk from the counter. He has a bad temper but a good sense of humor, which does not mask his sensitivity, as much as he would like it to. He is annoyed at being threatened over something stupid—if it were not stupid, he would not mind—and he acknowledges that he has a bad habit of getting attached to people.

One of these people is Steve, a character who clearly plays Rusty-James' *foil*—a character whose contrasting qualities help us see the main character's potential to turn things around, to behave differently and so perhaps create a different outcome in the story. Rusty-James comments that although Steve is also fourteen, he acts forty, which is his way of saying Steve is more concerned with adult consequences, such as the potential for gang violence. Rusty-James' only real concern is how to win the fight.

Steve is also Rusty-James' *confidante*—a character the main character goes to with his troubles. The confidante in a story provides advice as well as a sympathetic ear, and sometimes forces the main character to face those difficult issues that are troubling him. In this way, Steve becomes a very important character in the story, one who not only tries to help Rusty-James safely through the events of the story, but who also provides a balance for Rusty-James' violence. Steve tries to get Rusty-James to accept the fact that his brother, the Motorcycle Boy, may not come back, but Rusty-James refuses to talk about it. Instead, they talk about the neighborhood, which Steve is determined to leave. Rusty-James does not see any point in thinking about the future. We already know from the first chapter that his future is not positive, so this scene shows us one of Rusty-James' essential problems. Although we do not yet know why, we do know that Rusty-James is too caught up in his immediate problems to worry about long-term consequences, and the only we he knows to solve those problems is through violence. His reputation is more important to him than a future he cannot even envision.

Despite this, we sympathize with Rusty-James, a character caught between being a boy and a young man in a crummy neighborhood where gang violence is only a part of the recent past, and whose brother has left him, maybe forever. The trash-filled river gives us a sense of being trapped and stagnant, as Rusty-James may feel, even if he is not completely aware of it.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

After Steve has to go home, Rusty-James stops by his girlfriend Patty's place. Her mother works nights as a nurse, so Patty has to baby-sit her little brothers. Patty is upset with Rusty-James, though he can tell it is not for coming by when her mother is gone, as she says. He has been to the lake with Smokey recently, and she asks if there were girls there. Rusty-James says no, which pacifies her. They make out for a while, and then Rusty-James falls asleep. It is seven-thirty when he wakes up, and he is supposed to fight Biff at eight. This upsets Patty again, who reminds him that he promised he would not fight anymore. Rusty-James again soothes her, by telling her he loves her and reminding her that she's a hellcat, too, having gone after another girl with a broken bottle for flirting with him.

Smokey, B.J., and some others join Rusty-James as he walks to the vacant lot. Smokey is quiet, while Rusty-James, on a high from the prospect of the fight, is loud. He knows Smokey thinks he is tougher than Rusty-James is, and would fight him if he was sure, but he is not yet. The vacant lot stinks from the river. At the other end of it, Biff's gang is waiting. Rusty-James has no doubt he can beat Biff, but Biff surprises him by bringing a knife. Once the fight starts, all Rusty-James sees is red. Although Biff is two years older, Rusty-James beats him easily, disarming him and beating his face to a bloody pulp. He sits on Biff's chest and asks if he gives.

The two gangs wait tensely for word to jump in. Then a familiar voice interrupts, reminding them that they had "stopped this cowboys and Indians crap." It is the Motorcycle Boy. The crowd disperses in surprise and Rusty-James forgets about Biff. Biff uses the opportunity to grab the knife and cut Rusty-James down the side. In response, Motorcycle Boy breaks Biff's wrist and the gangs disperse.

Rusty-James refuses to go to the hospital, and he leans on Steve, who managed to sneak out of his house just before the end. Motorcycle Boy follows them home, telling Rusty-James that he has been in California. He had stolen a motorcycle, which was how he had gotten his name—Motorcycle Boy has a thing for cycles. Though he has stolen plenty for joy rides, he has never owned one. Motorcycle Boy does not care to own anything. He tells Rusty-James he did not get to the ocean—he never got past the river.

Rusty-James does not understand. There is a lot about Motorcycle Boy he does not understand. He is hard of hearing, because of all the concussions he has gotten on cycles, and he is colorblind. He has a different way of looking at things, which Rusty-James thinks is cool. Once when their gang, the Packers, was getting ready to rumble with a neighboring gang, Motorcycle Boy, who had been president, told the gang to get straight what they were fighting for. It was not control of the streets, he said, but just because fighting was fun.

Motorcycle Boy is seventeen, though Rusty-James and Steve see him as older than that. When Motorcycle Boy was fourteen, he was a big shot, president of the Packers. Everyone, even the older boys, did what he said. Rusty-James thought it would be the same when he was fourteen, but as he has gotten older, he has found nothing has changed, and Motorcycle Boy has only gone further on. Although they have the same dark red hair and brown eyes, Steve says they do not really look alike. You can never tell what Motorcycle Boy is thinking, while Rusty-James wears his heart on his sleeve.

The apartment they share with their old man is over a dry cleaner. Inside, there is a cot and a mattress, and Rusty-James lies down on the cot. Motorcycle Boy gets some wine from one of the bottles their old man left in the sink and pours it over Rusty-James' cut. It is deep, showing his rib bones.

Afterward, Motorcycle Boy goes out, and Steve tells Rusty-James he has to get home before his parents find him gone. Rusty-James asks him to wait until the old man gets back. He is afraid of being alone—it is the only thing Rusty-James is afraid of--and Steve is one of the only people who know that. He agrees to stay a little while, and Rusty-James drifts off to sleep. When he wakes up, Steve is gone and Motorcycle Boy is back. He is reading a book and their old man is snoring on the mattress. Rusty-James tells Motorcycle Boy he thought he would never come back, but Motorcycle Boy, without looking up from his book, says he gets homesick.

To make himself feel better, Rusty-James thinks about the people he likes, and wonders if he actually loves anyone. He loves Patty for sure, and the Motorcycle Boy. He sort of loves his father and Steve. However, he cannot think of anyone he can count on. He is glad the Motorcycle Boy is back. To Rusty-James, he is the coolest person in the world, and he wants to be just like him.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Motorcycle Boy, who was only mentioned in the previous chapter, makes his appearance in this one, stepping in before the fight between Rusty-James and Biff Wilcox erupts into a gang fight. Motorcycle Boy is an enigmatic character who seems much older than he really is, comparing the gang violence of the younger boys to playing cowboys and Indians. Idolized by all the boys, he is not only tough and fearless, but also seems to perceive people and the world in a way the others cannot.

Rusty-James thinks if he can learn to understand Motorcycle Boy, he will become just as tough. This is his driving motivation—to be just like his brother, which he thinks will make him the undisputed leader of the gang, even though gang violence is supposed to have ended. He is obviously tough, able to beat Biff even in an unfair fight, but he's beginning to realize that just looking and acting like Motorcycle Boy won't make him Motorcycle Boy.

Motorcycle Boy is a solitary figure with a love of motorcycles but no desire to own one—or anything else. He took off without a word and reappeared just as mysteriously, with

the cryptic remark that he "never got past the river." He is also hard of hearing and color blind, which may have resulted from head injuries, but serves to set him further apart. His color-blindness will later become a symbol for the way he perceives the world.

While Motorcycle Boy is utterly detached, Rusty-James feels better thinking about the people he loves, despite the fact that he cannot count on any of them. At home, we get a clearer idea of Rusty-James' environment—a small apartment over a dry cleaner with an absent father, a sink full of wine bottles, and only a cot and a mattress for three people, implying that not all of them are there together at any given time. There is little structure, and little that Rusty-James can depend on. It does not seem to bother Motorcycle Boy, though, and this may be why Rusty-James wants so badly to be like him.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Rusty-James goes to school the next day, though he is not feeling so hot. School is boring, but he gets to see people, and none of the teachers demands much. He's in the classes with the dumb kids; in grade school, they separate the dumb kids from the smart kids, and after a couple of years, Rusty-James figured out he's one of the dumb kids. He sees all the same kids year after year, except for Steve, who is in the smart classes but takes math with Rusty-James. When Steve does not show up, Rusty-James learns his mother is in the hospital from a stroke.

At lunch, Rusty-James goes down to the basement, where he loses fifty cents in a poker game with his friends. They tell him he is too easy to read, though he does not believe them. In gym class, Coach Ryan offers him five bucks to beat up a kid who is getting on his nerves. Rusty-James, who thinks the kid is obnoxious, says it will be a while and shows the coach his cut. This seems to impress the coach, who nevertheless does not impress Rusty-James very much—the coach seems to think being friends with Rusty-James will make him a big shot, like owning "a vicious dog."

After school, he goes to Benny's, where Steve finally shows up. His face is white, and Rusty-James goes for a walk with him. Steve says his mother is sick. Rusty-James tries to distract him by telling him about the coach's offer. Once, Motorcycle Boy was offered four hundred dollars to kill somebody, but he did not take it. He said if he ever killed somebody, it would not be for money.

However, this gets Rusty-James to thinking about money, on which he is short . His old man gets checks from the government, but sometimes he forgets to give Rusty-James some of the money before he drinks it up. Rusty-James does a lot of scrounging as a result; sometimes he borrows money from Motorcycle Boy, which he always pays back. He spots some simulated mags on a late-model Chevy and thinks they would get him twenty bucks, which would last him a while, so he stops to pull them off. Steve is too distracted to notice, taking each hubcap Rusty-James hands him, until the fourth one, when he realizes what is happening.

Steve says he does not steal, but Rusty-James says *he* does, and Steve knows it. Just then, some guys come running out of the apartment, and Rusty-James takes off. Steve stands like an idiot holding the hubcaps until Rusty-James yells at him to run. Steve runs, dropping the hubcaps along the way. This slows the guys, but it does not stop them, and Rusty-James drops the fourth hubcap, since one will not do him any good. The guys chase them to an apartment building, where they run up the stairs onto the roof.

Rusty-James leaps across the alley to the next roof over, but Steve is afraid to jump. Rusty-James coaches him along, and finally Steve jumps, barely making it across. He

lands on his belly over the edge, and then starts to slide off. Rusty-James grabs him, but the look on Steve's face is so funny he nearly drops him. He finally gets Steve up.

Steve is angry and tells Rusty-James he should not be stealing. Rusty-James says the hubcaps were probably already stolen, but Steve says it does not matter. The cut in Rusty-James' side has opened up again, and he passes out briefly. When he comes to, Steve is gone. Rusty-James is mad that Steve left him, even though he knows Steve has probably gone for help. Steve shows up with an irritated old lady, but Rusty-James takes off. He is so mad he does not realize for a while that Steve is crying next to him. He thinks Steve must be worried about his mother. Rusty-James does not know how that feels, since he does not even remember his own mom.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The primary purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on what we have learned about Rusty-James and his environment. He has been stuck in the "dumb kid" classes, though Rusty-James is not necessarily dumb. Despite his bad grammar, he understands his environment and the people in it well enough. In the last chapter, he knew his girlfriend was deflecting her anger over one thing to something else, and in this chapter, he reads the coach as someone using him as he would a vicious dog. He can tell Steve is very upset over his mother, and he tries to make him feeler, though he is unable to identify with Steve, not having a mother himself.

We do not yet know what happened to Rusty-James' mother, but his father is an alcoholic who generally leaves Rusty-James to fend for himself. Rusty-James does not steal for the fun of it, but because he needs money to eat. In fact, when he borrows money, he makes a habit of paying it back. This indicates that Rusty-James has an honor system of his own, which he follows, but that circumstances have made it impossible for him to get along in the world without resorting to crime and violence. In his neighborhood, this does not seem unusual, and this is how Rusty-James tries to rationalize his behavior. However, Steve, again playing the foil, refuses to accept the rationalization, saying it is wrong to steal.

The conflict between the two over the hubcaps is the first strong indication of the primary theme that holds the book together. Rusty-James is a product of his environment, but it is unclear whether he has to give in to that environment. Steve does not believe he has to, while Rusty-James is too focused on his present problems to see any way out. As far as Rusty-James knows, the future only holds more of the same, and his only fear, shown again in this chapter, is being alone.

Throughout the book, S. E. Hinton uses animal metaphors to describe characters. In Chapter 2, Steve was compared to a sincere but nervous rabbit, and in this chapter, Rusty-James compares himself to a vicious dog, at least in the eyes of Coach Ryan. Unlike Motorcycle Boy, who Rusty-James describes as a panther, Rusty-James sees himself as a pack animal. He may be vicious and bad-tempered, like a stray in the streets, but he is also driven to run in a group. Rusty-James wants to be with others, but

he is unable to control his impulses, and he blames others for making him mad enough to use his fists. Although he recognizes that his behavior is often animal-like, he seems to feel powerless to prevent it. One of the central questions of the story is what role his environment plays in his behavior and his feelings of powerlessness. In order to survive, does Rusty-James have to be the toughest kid in the neighborhood, as he believes?

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Rusty-James goes home, where he meets Cassandra on the stairs. Cassandra is Motorcycle Boy's old girlfriend, and she used to be a student teacher at their school. Rusty-James has never liked Cassandra. She is college-educated and from a good family, but she moved into an old apartment nearby and goes barefoot and without makeup. Cassandra shows Rusty-James the track marks on her arms. She says she is not hooked; it was just to take the edge off when Motorcycle Boy was gone. Now Motorcycle Boy does not like her, because he hates drugs. He told Rusty-James he would break his arm if he ever did dope.

Inside the apartment, Motorcycle Boy is staring at the wall. Rusty-James finds some sardines and crackers to eat and checks his cut. Motorcycle Boy says it looks like Rusty-James is always messed up, one way or the other. The sympathy surprises Rusty-James. Motorcycle Boy does not usually pay any attention to him.

After a while, their father comes home, not as drunk as usual. He asks what happened to Rusty-James, or "Russel-James," as his old man calls him. Rusty-James says he was cut in a knife fight. His father comments on what a strange life the boys lead. To Rusty-James, their father speaks funny. He used to be a lawyer, but Rusty-James never tells anyone this, since he does not think anybody would believe him. It is hard to believe a lawyer can end up a drunk on welfare.

He does not concern himself much with either of the boys, though he likes Rusty-James better than he likes Motorcycle Boy, who reminds him of their mother. He gives Rusty-James ten dollars before settling down with his book and his bottle. That is about all their old man does—read and drink. Motorcycle Boy is quiet so long Rusty-James thinks he is upset about Cassandra. To make him feel better, Rusty-James says he does not think Cassandra is hooked on drugs, but Motorcycle Boy says he believes her, because you know what happens to people who do not believe Cassandra. When Rusty-James looks confused, their father says the Greeks got them. Rusty-James hopes the two do not get going on an all-night talk, which they do occasionally, about things he does not understand. Instead, when Rusty-James asks Motorcycle Boy if he has stopped liking Cassandra, Motorcycle Boy gets up and leaves without a word.

At midnight, Smokey and his cousin come by and Rusty-James goes with them to the lake, where they meet up with a bunch of girls. They build a fire, drink beer and swim, and Rusty-James does not get home until early in the morning. The old man wakes up, says a policeman was by looking for either him or Motorcycle Boy and asks which one it is. Rusty-James says both, but probably Motorcycle Boy. He knows the cop, who has always hated both of them. He is tired, and he cuts school and sleeps until noon.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 5 is also used to characterize, this time focusing on Motorcycle Boy and their father. We learn that their father was once a lawyer, whose alcoholism has left him on welfare, and mainly absent and detached from his sons' lives. The only comment he makes about Rusty-James' knife-cut is that his sons lead a strange life. Rusty-James does not tell anyone his father used to be a lawyer; being a lawyer seems to hold prestige, while his father's downfall seems to Rusty-James more embarrassing than it might have been if he had started out on welfare. For the same reason, Rusty-James does not like Cassandra, who, given a better life by her family, chose to leave it for his own crummy neighborhood.

His father seems to be as incomprehensible to Rusty-James as he and his brother are to the "old man." However, despite the fact that Rusty-James believes his father likes him better than Motorcycle Boy, his brother shares a relationship with their father that Rusty-James cannot penetrate. Motorcycle Boy is an avid reader, and smart enough to have passed his semester tests with perfect scores. When he and their father talk, they make references Rusty-James does not understand. The reference to Cassandra is to the Cassandra of Greek mythology, the prophetess whose gift for seeing the future was more of a curse, since those listening only heard lies. While Cassandra saw all the terrible events to come, no one listened, and she was powerless to prevent them. In referring to Cassandra, Motorcycle Boy, who sees what others cannot, may be foreshadowing the climax of the story.

Rumble Fish is not a tightly plotted story, following a sequence of events from a beginning to a logical conclusion. Rather, much of this story relies on characterization—the description of people and their motivations—to explore a central theme, in this case whether Rusty-James is a victim of his environment or might have been able to overcome it. For this reason, we get the impression that any of these events could have happened at any time. Motorcycle Boy was only gone two weeks, and it was not the first time he left and came back. The fight with Biff was not Rusty-James' first encounter with a knife. Rusty-James goes from Benny's to his girlfriend's, from school to home, as he does every day, knowing that no one is really available for him, and he has to rely on himself to survive. As we learn more and more about the characters in the story, we get a sense of inevitability, just as we do in a Greek tragedy, in which the main characters are trapped by fate, or the will of the gods. Again, Hinton wants us to ask whether or not Rusty-James is trapped by his own fate, or if he could overcome it. He thinks he can overcome his problems by becoming like Motorcycle Boy, but Motorcycle Boy, who perceives what Rusty-James cannot, seems to see a bleaker future, thus his reference to the mythical Cassandra and his detachment from the real one, along with the rest of the world.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Rusty-James makes it to school by one o'clock, but he is sent to Mr. Harrigan, the guidance counselor, who expels him. He shuffles papers as if Rusty-James is wasting his time, but Rusty-James thinks if they would quit sending him in there, he would not have to waste Mr. Harrigan's time. Mr. Harrigan reads off a long list of Rusty-James' offenses: fighting, swearing, smoking, sassing teachers, and cutting classes. He says he is being sent to Cleveland High, where they know how to handle kids like Rusty-James.

Cleveland is Biff's school, and Rusty-James knows if he goes there, he is a dead man. Since the fight, he and Biff have left each other alone, but he would need a machine gun and eyes in the back of his head to survive going into Biff's home turf. Mr. Harrigan tells him he ought to give some thought to his future, but Rusty-James thinks he is too busy worrying about money, and about what is going on with Motorcycle Boy, and now about Biff Wilcox, to think very far past the now.

Rusty-James leaves school and wanders around the neighborhood. If he does not show up at Cleveland on Monday, they will send him to the Youth Detention Center, but they will be straightening out paperwork for weeks before they come after him. He decides that will give him some time to figure out what to do.

He is thrown out of a few bars, one of them filled with junkies. One of the junkies is Motorcycle Boy's old lieutenant, though not his friend. It strikes Rusty-James that Motorcycle Boy does not have any friends—only people who admire him or are afraid of him, or both.

When school lets out, he waits for Patty at the bus stop, but when she gets off the bus, she walks right past him. He asks her what is up, and she says she heard about the lake party, and the girls. Patty is a sweet, tough chick, and Rusty-James does not see why something so stupid as messing around with some girl should interfere with what they have. However, she tells him to get lost. Rusty-James feels an unfamiliar tightening in his chest and wonders if he is going to cry, which he has not done in ages.

He finds Motorcycle Boy in the drugstore looking at a magazine. There is a picture of Motorcycle Boy inside, leaning on a cycle. He looks happy, though he is not smiling. The picture looks like a painting. Motorcycle Boy tells him it was taken by a famous photographer, but not to tell anybody. He does not feel up to being Robin Hood, Jesse James and the Pied Piper all in one, and would just as soon stay a neighborhood novelty. Rusty-James knows what he means. Motorcycle Boy is famous in the neighborhood, and the others would follow him anywhere. Motorcycle Boy says that would be great, if he knew where to go.

When they come out of the drugstore, Rusty-James spots Patterson, the cop who had been looking for them. Motorcycle Boy does not notice. When Rusty-James says it was a good picture, Motorcycle Boy smiles, but he does not look happy. Motorcycle Boy hardly ever smiles, and it scares Rusty-James when he does.

Chapter 6 Analysis

In Chapter 6, Rusty-James' behavior catches up with him and he has to face the inevitable consequences. Despite the fact that his own actions have led him to be expelled from school, we cannot help but sympathize with Rusty-James, whose problems at home are significant enough to make it difficult, if not impossible, for him to avoid trouble. In addition, after the knife fight, it is not hard to believe that Bill Wilcox and his gang would kill him for intruding into their territory.

What is not clear is how well Rusty-James understands his own responsibility, or the fact that he has a choice in his behavior. When Patty dumps him, he is surprised, not because he was not guilty of fooling around, but because in his mind it did not mean anything. This fails to take into account Patty's feelings or the consequences he will face for giving in to his impulses. Even faced with the consequences, Rusty-James does not feel responsible.

Wandering from bar to bar as he kills time, Rusty-James runs into some of Motorcycle Boy's old gang members, who have deteriorated into junkies. For the first time, Rusty-James realizes that Motorcycle Boy, as feared and respected as he is, has never had any friends. When he finds Motorcycle Boy in the drugstore looking at his own picture in the magazine, Rusty-James learns that leadership and fame are more of a burden than anything is, because there is nowhere to lead, and nowhere to go.

As at the end of the last chapter, the policeman, Patterson, is shown briefly at the end of this one, foreshadowing a violent, climactic conflict with the law.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

That night, Rusty-James talks Steve into coming out with him and Motorcycle Boy. It is not hard, since Steve has been weird, reckless, since his mother went in the hospital. The three walk across the bridge, Rusty-James carrying a bottle of sneaky Pete he filled with cherry vodka. Steve does not normally drink, but he does now. Motorcycle Boy does not, saying he likes to stay in control. Steve says that makes good sense, having warned Rusty-James about drinking too much. He is worried Rusty-James will end up like his old man.

They cross into the city, where the strip is lit in neon. Rusty-James loves all the colors and asks Motorcycle Boy how he sees them. Motorcycle Boy says he guesses it is like a black and white TV, though sometimes it seems like he can remember colors, from when he was a little kid. He stopped being a little kid when he was five.

Motorcycle Boy buys them tickets to a skin flick. Inside, Steve worries about a police raid, and asks Rusty-James if you can refuse to be bailed out of jail if you are afraid to go home. Motorcycle Boy just sits and watches the people. It is a habit of his, and Steve does the same, until Rusty-James gets him to look at what is playing on the screen. Steve is shocked they actually film *that*, and runs out. Motorcycle Boy and Rusty-James find him leaning against a light pole, looking sick. He says some guy in the bathroom asked him if he liked the movie and Steve got a funny feeling about it.

They walk on, Rusty-James revved up by the bright lights and all the people. He loves the city, and he loves crowds. Aloud, he wonders if it is because he hates being alone so much. Motorcycle Boy tells him that when he was six and Rusty-James was two their mother decided to leave and took Motorcycle Boy with her. Their old man went on a three-day bender, leaving Rusty-James alone all the first day.

Rusty-James is shocked. He does not remember anything of their mother; it is as if she is dead, only she is not. He cannot believe Motorcycle Boy remembers her. Suddenly, he is afraid of Motorcycle Boy. He does not know why, because he has never been afraid of him before, though everyone else is. Then Motorcycle Boy knocks him flat when he says he found their mother in California. He saw her in the audience of some award show on television and went to California to find her. She was living with some movie producer, though she was planning to move into a tree house with an artist, up in the mountains.

She was happy to see him and wanted him to stay. Apparently, she and Motorcycle Boy have the same sense of humor; she thought California was as funny as he did. Now, Motorcycle Boy says California "is like a beautiful wild kid on heroin, high as a kite and thinking she's on top of the world, not knowing she's dying, not believing it even if you show her the marks."

Rusty-James asks if she said anything about him, but Motorcycle Boy goes deaf again and ignores him. He moves on ahead, through the crowd, leaving Rusty-James furious. He cannot believe Motorcycle Boy did not say anything. He punches an old guy who is in his way, and when Steve protests, Rusty-James tells him not to bug him right now. The whole world seems messed up.

Soon, Rusty-James forgets himself in the lights and noise. He clowns around, picking fights and flirting with girls, Motorcycle Boy watching him all the while with an amused but disinterested expression. After a while, they find a party, and Steve makes out with a girl in a corner. He asks Rusty-James if this is a dream. As the night wears on, they go back out into the city, where there are more and more lights and people and colors. It does seem sort of like a dream and Rusty-James tells Motorcycle Boy it is too bad he cannot see what it is like.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The fact that Motorcycle Boy was not always colorblind implies that the condition is as much psychological as physical. Something stripped the colors from Motorcycle Boy's perception of the world, while Rusty-James is entranced by them. In fact, Rusty-James feels more alive in the midst of all the bright colors, sounds and people, than he does at any other time. The reason becomes clear when Motorcycle Boy tells him about his three-day abandonment after their mother left and their father went on a drinking binge.

For the first time in his life, Rusty-James is afraid of Motorcycle Boy. He isn't sure why, but it's clear to the reader that Motorcycle Boy has intimate knowledge of why Rusty-James is the way he is, and it's the same reason Motorcycle Boy is so detached. He has seen and experienced things, like their mother's abandonment, that changed him forever. Rusty-James is afraid of knowing what his brother does.

However, Motorcycle Boy continues to tell him about his trip to California, where he found their mother. She is apparently living a good life while her sons struggle to survive, though this does not seem to affect Motorcycle Boy at all. Instead, he shares her dark sense of humor, comparing California to a kid on heroin. The comparison is important, since it fits Rusty-James, too, high on the colors and sounds and the immediate energy of the city, and not realizing how empty it is, or seeing his own impending destruction. Ironically, Rusty-James tells Motorcycle Boy that it's too bad he can't see what the city is really like, not realizing that Motorcycle Boy sees far beyond the superficial colors.

Steve's edginess is important, but Rusty-James, caught up in his own problems—or rather, his desire to forget them in a good time—fails to notice.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

They end up in a bar mostly filled with black people that do not bother Rusty-James. Motorcycle Boy plays pool while Rusty-James and Steve sit at a table, watching. A guy nearby comments on how fine Motorcycle Boy is, and Rusty-James says he is going to look just like him. The guy says no, he will not. Motorcycle Boy is a prince, "royalty in exile." Irritable after having been throwing up all night, Steve asks Rusty-James if there is anything the Motorcycle Boy cannot do.

When they look up again, Motorcycle Boy is gone. Rusty-James is not surprised; Motorcycle Boy often forgets about him. He and Steve go outside, but the streets and alleys are dark and spooky. Rusty-James hurries Steve along, trying to take shortcuts through the alleys, until two guys, one black and one white, step out of the darkness. One is holding a tire iron.

Rusty-James actually feels relieved. He is more afraid of the empty darkness than he is of fighting. They ask for money, and Rusty-James starts thinking about his own death, how Patty will really be sorry, how Coach Ryan will say he knew Rusty-James when, because the pathetic man is so eager to improve his rep he will use a kid to do it. He thinks about his father at his funeral, commenting on what a strange way to die it was, and his mother in her tree house. He thinks how all the guys at Benny's will think it is so cool he died fighting like some of the old gang members had. The last guy killed was a Packer, and he was fifteen. Rusty-James had thought that was so old until now, when he realizes he will not see fifteen.

Steve, who has been freaking out, says something behind him, and Rusty-James turns to tell him to bug off or something. He does not remember anything that happens next, but Steve tells him later that one of the guys whacked him in the head with the tire iron. Rusty-James only remembers floating above himself, seeing Steve freaking out, and hearing the guys saying he was dead, and they had better kill the other one, too. Rusty-James knew if he did not get back in his body now he never would, and suddenly he was desperate to get back into his body. Then he was. He cannot move or open his eyes, and his head is killing him. The alley smells like a toilet. He thinks if he does not get up the guys are going to kill Steve, but he cannot.

There is some commotion, and then someone drags him up and says he is not dead. It is Motorcycle Boy. He sounds glad, but more surprised than anything, as if he had not realized he actually loved Rusty-James. Steve is crying, and Motorcycle Boy lights a cigarette, leaning Rusty-James' head on his shoulder. He says what a funny situation this is, to find himself holding his half-dead brother surrounded by bricks and cement and rats. However, he figures it is as good a place as any is. There are not as many walls in California, and if you are used to walls, that can give you the creeps.

Rusty-James suddenly realizes that his brother is alone, more alone than Rusty-James will ever be. He lives in a kind of bubble, looking at the world from inside it. He keeps talking in nonsense Rusty-James cannot make sense of, and Rusty-James drifts in and out until he comes to for good. His head hurts worse than any knife cut ever did. Steve tells him he really ought to go to the hospital this time, but Rusty-James refuses, bringing up the rumbles again.

Steve explodes. He says the gangs were not anything but a bunch of kids killing each other. Motorcycle Boy agrees. He says it was not anything but fun, until it got to be a big bore. The only reason he got credit for ending it was because everybody knew he thought it was a bore. He says they would have ended anyway, because of all the dope. Steve says he cannot call it fun, and Motorcycle Boy says that was just his experience; most people did not think it was fun. They were terrified, which just looked like courage.

He says that it is apparently essential to most people to belong, anywhere. That is when Rusty-James realizes what sets Motorcycle Boy apart—he does not belong anywhere, and he does not want to. That is what makes people afraid of him. Motorcycle Boy says even primitive societies have an innate respect for the insane. He tells Rusty-James not to worry; people persist in joining things. When they get rid of the dope, Rusty-James will see the gangs again, if he lives that long.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter forms an important turning point in the story, in which Rusty-James realizes just how alone Motorcycle Boy is. Motorcycle Boy is utterly detached from everyone including his brother, as if he is trapped in a glass bubble looking out. Although this isolation immediately scares Rusty-James, he clings to what he believes to be true—the gangs.

However, Steve and Motorcycle Boy both tell him that the gangs were meaningless, except to people like Rusty-James, who feel the need to belong somewhere. In fact, most people feel the need to belong, and apparently, the only way to do it in Rusty-James' world is to be part of a gang. However, being part of a gang comes at the cost of violence, even death. Still, it seems a less frightening prospect to Rusty-James than knowing the complete isolation of his brother, a state so unnatural that it is the primary reason for others' fear of him.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Rusty-James is hurting so bad the next day he decides to go to the free clinic. The doctor looks too young to be a doctor, but he is nice, and he does not ask questions. He tells Rusty-James he needs to go to the hospital for x-rays, but Rusty-James hates hospitals more than jail. He leaves, swiping some aspirin from a drugstore.

He goes to Steve's house, figuring that since his dad would be at work and his mother still in the hospital, he would be alone. Rusty-James has never been to Steve's, though he knows where it is. Steve sees him coming and holds the door open.

Rusty-James is shocked by the bruises on Steve's face. He wonders if it happened during the mugging; his memory of it is fuzzy, and that seems to be when his memory started going bad. However, Steve admits his father did it, though he asks Rusty-James to tell everyone it happened in the fight. It really makes Rusty-James mad that Steve's dad would do that. Rusty-James has punched Steve before, but he has never let anyone else do it. Steve does not deserve it, but Steve tells him he got in at six in the morning, when he was supposed to be back at ten at night, and he worried his dad when his dad was already worried about his mother. Steve says he should not have done that, but Rusty-James thinks he sounds like he has been brainwashed.

Rusty-James tells him he wants help following Motorcycle Boy. Steve asks why, but Rusty-James does not have an answer ready. Ever since Motorcycle Boy told him why he was scared to be alone, nothing has felt solid. Rusty-James is used to worrying about real things, not things he cannot define. He cannot fight something if he does not know what it is.

He thinks if he follows Motorcycle Boy, he will figure out how to be like him. Then nothing will touch him. However, Steve refuses, no matter how much Rusty-James pleads and threatens. In addition, Rusty-James is too tired to keep up a front. With anyone else, he would, but he has known Steve all his life, and he supposes that is why Steve is his best friend—he does not have to keep up a front with him.

Steve tells Rusty-James he is like a ball in a pinball machine, "getting slammed back and forth." He never thinks about where he is going or how he is going to get there. Steve says he cannot keep thinking for the both of them, that he has to worry about himself. Rusty-James does not understand about what he is talking. He thinks if he can figure out how to be like Motorcycle Boy, he will be the toughest street fighter on their side of the river.

Steve tells him if he is around Motorcycle Boy very long, he will not believe in anything, but Rusty-James says he has been around him all his life and he believes everything.

Steve grins and says he would. Then they say goodbye. It is the last time Rusty-James sees Steve.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Rusty-James has been so preoccupied with his own problems that he has failed to notice the ones Steve has faced. In supporting Rusty-James, Steve has not only incurred the wrath of his abusive father, but also feels he has begun to risk his future. Despite Steve's advice, Rusty-James has failed to change, and is still clinging to the notion that if he becomes tough like Motorcycle Boy he will solve his problems. Because he does not change, Steve feels forced to cut him loose. Thus, Rusty-James loses his one true friend. Even sadder is the fact that Rusty-James is so obsessed with Motorcycle Boy that he lets Steve go without a fight.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Rusty-James goes to Benny's, where he describes the events of the night. Then Patty comes in. It is the first time she has ever come to Benny's, but she has not come for Rusty-James. She slides into a booth and waits until Smokey comes in and joins her. Rusty-James knows she still loves him, just like he still loves her, but neither one of them will say it. He thinks it is odd for it to end like that.

Everyone is quiet and nervous, thinking Rusty-James will fight Smokey, but Rusty-James cannot seem to find his temper. He knows he is too hurt to fight, anyway, so he asks Smokey to come outside with him, insisting he does not want to fight. They go outside, where they sit on a stoop and smoke.

Rusty-James asks Smokey if he brought him to the lake party with the girls knowing word would get back to Patty and she would dump him. Smokey admits the idea had occurred to him; Rusty-James would not be able to fight him with that cut in his side. Rusty-James still cannot find his temper, which used to be so mean, and he lets it go. Smokey tells him he would be president if the gangs were still around, and not Rusty-James. Rusty-James might be second lieutenant—he would make it for a while on Motorcycle Boy's reputation—but he does not have the brains to lead. Nobody would follow Rusty-James into a gang fight because he would get him killed, and nobody wants to get killed. Rusty-James admits that is probably true.

Rusty-James realizes everything has changed. Nothing is as simple as he thought it was. Smokey is the number one tough cat now, and if Rusty-James wants to keep his reputation, he will have to fight Smokey, which he is in no condition to do. After Smokey goes back in, Rusty-James sits for a while. B.J. sees him on his way in. B.J. does not know yet that Smokey has replaced Rusty-James as number one, so Rusty-James figures he can talk to him. B.J. tells him they had a substitute in history today, and it was Cassandra. She said to tell Rusty-James that life goes on, if you will let it. Rusty-James says she is a dingbat, always talking crazy, but B.J. thinks she has class. He also says he heard Motorcycle Boy stomped a couple of guys last night, and that he had better be careful, because that cop Patterson is just looking for an excuse to get him. He is a good cop, B.J. says; his only bad point is Motorcycle Boy. He has never harassed anyone else. However, Rusty-James says Patterson beat him up once and had him thrown into Juvenile Hall. He figures Patterson is the only one who has ever thought he and Motorcycle Boy looked alike.

Rusty-James asks if he has seen Motorcycle Boy, and B.J. tells him that he is in the pet store. There, Rusty-James finds Motorcycle Boy staring at a bunch of colorful fish on the counter. Each fish is in its own bowl. When he asks why, Motorcycle Boy tells him they are rumble fish, Siamese fighting fish. They will kill each other if they are not kept apart. He says if you hold a mirror up to them, they will even try to kill their own

reflections. He wonders if they would act that way in the river. Rusty-James tries to make conversation, but he does not understand what Motorcycle Boy is saying. He asks Motorcycle Boy if he wants to go out tonight, but Motorcycle Boy goes deaf again. When the pet-store owner locks up for the day, Rusty-James follows Motorcycle Boy as best he can. It is the only thing he can think to do.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The rumble fish emerge as a metaphor for both Rusty-James and Motorcycle Boy, who fight out of pure instinct, or just because it is fun. They symbolize the futility of the fighters, isolated by their instincts or behavior, and so trapped alone in their glass bubbles forever. When Smokey tricks Patty into dumping Rusty-James, he shows that violence will only take Rusty-James so far. Even though the boys want to belong, they do not want to die, and Rusty-James, with his poor impulse control, will only get them killed. Rusty-James' way of dealing with his problems has not only stripped him of his prestige but has also left him completely alone, his biggest fear. The only person he has left is Motorcycle Boy, but with his self-enforced isolation, his brother is unlikely to save him.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

They go home, where Motorcycle Boy sits on the mattress with a book and Rusty-James sits waiting, filled with a terrible tension but not knowing what it is he's waiting for. He remembers the last rumble, when Bill Braden died and Rusty-James was sliced by a knife. Motorcycle Boy had sent at least three guys to the hospital, but in the middle of the screaming, fighting people, he had laughed aloud.

When their father comes in, Rusty-James asks him if their mother was crazy. Surprised, the old man says no. Their marriage was an example of the preacher trying to convert an atheist by marrying her. She married him for fun, and when it stopped being fun, she left. He is smiling, but looking through Rusty-James like Motorcycle Boy does. It is the first time Rusty-James sees a resemblance between them, and the first time he thinks of his father as a person with a past that does not have anything to do with him.

His father says that every now and then someone comes along with a different view of the world. It does not make them crazy, though it can drive you crazy. To Rusty-James, his father is still speaking in riddles, and he begs him to talk normal. His father says that his mother was not crazy, and neither is his brother. Motorcycle Boy was just born in the wrong time. He would have made a perfect knight or a good pagan prince in a time of heroes. However, he "was born in the wrong era, on the wrong side of the river, with the ability to do anything and finding nothing he wants to do." Rusty-James asks him if he thinks he'll look just like Motorcycle Boy when he gets older, and his father tells him he'd better pray to God not.

That night, Motorcycle Boy breaks into the pet shop. Rusty-James, following him, is more scared than he has ever been. He tells Motorcycle Boy that if he needs money, liquor stores are a better bet. Motorcycle Boy just ignores him. Panicking now, Rusty-James says everybody saw him at the store earlier, but Motorcycle Boy flips on the light, then stands calm and still in the glare. Rusty-James realizes he is seeing something Rusty-James cannot see, but their father was right; he is not crazy.

Then Motorcycle Boy starts opening all the cages, letting the animals out. Rusty-James watches, crying for the first time since he can remember. Motorcycle Boy is on his way to the river with the fish when Rusty-James hears the siren. He runs for the door, where thousands of red lights fill the street. Doors are slamming and people are shouting. Rusty-James runs for the river, and then hears shots.

He is told later that there was a warning shot, but he does not see how they expected Motorcycle Boy to hear it, being half-deaf. The guy who shot him knew it. Rusty-James gets to the river in time to see them turn over Motorcycle Boy. He is smiling, the rumble fish flapping and dying around him.

Rusty-James is thrown against a police car and frisked. Staring at the flashing light, he realizes it has lost its color. He looks around. Everything is black and white and gray. The crowd and the police cars all seem silent, like a TV with the sound off. He tries screaming, but he cannot hear it. Rusty-James knows then that he is alone, in a glass bubble as Motorcycle Boy was and that he would be alone for the rest of his life.

Then a pain slices through his head and everything goes black. The noises come back, deafening now, and he hears someone say they had better get him to a hospital, that he is probably in shock. He hears someone else say he is probably on dope. Rusty-James slams his fists through the car window, slashing his wrists on the broken glass.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11 forms the climax of the book, when Motorcycle Boy is killed and Rusty-James is arrested for breaking into the pet store. The fact that Motorcycle Boy is the one who broke in, and that Rusty-James only followed because he was afraid of what his brother was going to do, presents a tragic irony. Rusty-James is not entirely responsible, but his reputation and circumstances have resulted in these consequences.

When he suddenly goes colorblind, it is because Rusty-James sees what his brother did—perhaps hopelessness, the futility of his own circumstances. When he also goes temporarily deaf, he finally realizes he is completely alone, trapped in the same kind of glass bubble that trapped Motorcycle Boy and the rumble fish. Despite his father's warnings about turning out like Motorcycle Boy, and Steve and Mr. Harrigan's advice to think of his future, Rusty-James has accomplished what he set out to do—be just like Motorcycle Boy. Now Motorcycle Boy is dead, and Rusty-James is isolated and dead on the inside.

According to their father, Motorcycle Boy is doomed because he was born in the wrong era, a natural leader with nowhere, as Motorcycle Boy said, to lead. This presents the same question Hinton has asked from the beginning: Were Motorcycle Boy and Rusty-James doomed by their own character and environment? On the other hand, could one or both of them have, like Steve Hays, found another way out? Motorcycle Boy clearly did not believe there was another way. In trying to release the rumble fish, he was dooming them to kill each other or to die in the stagnant, trash-filled river that trapped the neighborhood. Moreover, Rusty-James is left behind, replacing the figure of Motorcycle Boy to continue a pattern that cannot seem to be broken.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

In the present, on the beach, Steve is saying he never went back. He asks if Rusty-James did, and Rusty-James says no. Steve says he made up his mind to get out, and he did. He learned that if you want to get somewhere all you have to do is make up your mind to do it and then work until you make it. Rusty-James says it will be nice when he can think of somewhere to go.

Steve offers to buy him a beer, but Rusty-James says he lost his taste for alcohol in the reformatory. Steve is glad to hear it; he was always afraid Rusty-James would end up like his old man. Rusty-James stares out at the ocean, liking the fact that there will always be another wave and that the ocean has always been there and always will be. Steve is talking about Motorcycle Boy now, saying he never would have believed it, but Rusty-James does look like him after all.

Rusty-James thinks Steve looks like a ghost from the past, too. Steve heads off across the sand, waving, and Rusty-James waves back. He does not plan to meet Steve for dinner, or ever see him again. He figures that if he does not see Steve, he will start forgetting again, though it is taking longer than he thought that it would.

Chapter 12 Analysis

The book concludes back in the present, in the same scene between Rusty-James and Steve on the beach. However, the events of the past make the scene much more tragic. Steve maintains that if you work hard you can overcome your environment, while Rusty-James still fails to see it. His former best friend is like a stranger to him, a ghost from the past he does not want to see, because he does not want to remember, or face what has happened. In addition, to Steve, Rusty-James is a ghost of Motorcycle Boy, having finally, tragically and ironically accomplished his goal.

Characters

Smokey Bennet

Smokey, named for the unusual color of his eyes, is one of Rusty James's friends and a member of the group, but he is nervous about gang violence. When Rusty James says of the "old days" when he was eleven, "A gang really meant somethin' back then," Smokey says, "Meant gettin' sent to the hospital once a week." Smokey is not a loyal friend; he sets things up to make it look like Rusty James is cheating on his girlfriend Patty so she'll dump Rusty James and Smokey can go out with her. He also tells Rusty James that if the gangs were still around, he would be president, not Rusty James.

B. J.

B. J. is a friend of Rusty James's, one of the group. He is fat but tough. As Rusty James says, "Tough fat guys ain't as rare as you think."

Cassandra

Cassandra was a student teacher at the high school the year before, and the Motorcycle Boy was in one of her classes. She fell in love with him, and although she has a college education and comes from a good family, she moved into an apartment in Rusty James's part of town and now follows the Motorcycle Boy around. She doesn't wear makeup, often goes barefoot, and has a lot of cats. Rusty James views her as phony because she tries to talk like the Motorcycle Boy, saying "meaningful" things. She is a drug addict, whose habit the Motorcycle Boy detests.

Mr. Harrigan

Mr. Harrigan is the guidance counselor at Rusty James's school. Rusty James says, "There was something about Mr. Harrigan that made my mind go kind of blank, even when he was swatting me with a board."

Weston McCauley

McCauley is a former friend of the Motorcycle Boy and used to be second lieutenant in the Packers, the local gang. He's a heroin addict now.

Midget

Midget is a tall, skinny kid who notifies Rusty James that Biff Wilcox is out to get him.

Motorcycle Boy

The Motorcycle Boy, whose real name the reader never learns, is Rusty James's older brother and hero. He got his name because he loves motorcycles and steals them and rides them. He is not interested in owning one, though. He is colorblind and sometimes

deaf as a result of motorcycle accidents, and although he is a charismatic, natural leader, he's also odd—not quite connected to the rest of humanity. Rusty James says, "He had strange eyes—they made me think of a two-way mirror. Like you could feel somebody on the other side watching you, but the only reflection you saw was your own." He has been expelled from school for scoring "perfect tests"; it's clear that the authorities assumed he was cheating but not clear whether he actually was. It seems that he might be much smarter than the school gives him credit for because he reads a great deal. He has always seemed older than his real age, and he tells Rusty James, "I stopped bein' a little kid when I was five." When he was fourteen, storekeepers stopped asking for his ID, so he could buy liquor. At the same age, he was the leader of the gang, the Packers, and older kids asked for his advice. Later, he decided that gang violence was stupid and boring and put a stop to it. He detests drug addicts, and rumor has it that he once killed a junkie. He tells Rusty James that if he ever uses drugs, he'll break Rusty James's arm, and Rusty James believes him.

Roy Patterson

Roy Patterson is a police officer who has a grudge against Rusty James and the Motorcycle Boy and is constantly on the lookout for a way to "get" them. In the end, he kills the Motorcycle Boy without warning when the Motorcycle Boy is stealing fish from a pet store.

Patty

Patty is Rusty James's girlfriend. Her mother is a nurse who works nights, and Patty has to stay home and take care of her little brothers. She has bleached blond hair and is tough. She once went after another girl with a broken bottle because the girl was flirting with Rusty James.

Don Price

Price is a smart-alecky kid who's been giving Coach Ryan trouble. Ryan offers Rusty James five dollars to beat him up.

Rusty James

Rusty James, whose legal name is Russel James, is fourteen during the main action of the book but talks and acts like someone much older and tougher. He confesses that he's not very bright and that he has a temper. He steals, curses, smokes, drinks, and gets into fights about once a week, although he hasn't lost one in two years. He idolizes his older brother, Motorcycle Boy, and wants to be just like him because Motorcycle Boy is "the coolest person in the whole world." He doesn't think much about the future, or the past, preferring to live in the present. His friend Steve is important to him because Steve is perhaps the only stable person he has ever known. Rusty James was left alone in his parents' house for three days when he was two years old because his mother left the family, taking the Motorcycle Boy, and his father disappeared on a three-day drinking binge. Perhaps because of this, Rusty James hates to be alone and dreads the day the Motorcycle Boy will leave home for good.

Rusty James's Father

Rusty James's father, whom his sons call "the old man," is an alcoholic. He has been to law school and has a large vocabulary and an educated way of speaking. He is "a middle-sized, middle-aged guy, kind of blond and balding on top, and has light-blue eyes. He was the kind of person nobody ever noticed. He had a lot of friends, though, mostly bartenders." He is completely detached from his sons and views them the way an anthropologist would view an unfamiliar tribe. "What strange lives you two lead," he says mildly when he learns that Rusty James has been cut in a knife fight.

He began drinking when Rusty James's mother left: he went on a three-day binge, and it was, according to him, the first time he was ever drunk. He says of his marriage and his downfall from lawyer to skid-row drunk, "Our marriage was a classic example of a preacher marrying an atheist, thinking to make a convert, and instead ending up doubting his own faith." This implies that his wife was some sort of criminal. He says, "She married me for fun, and when it stopped being fun she left."

Rusty James's Mother

Rusty James's mother left the family when Rusty James was two and the Motorcycle Boy was six. At first, she took the Motorcycle Boy with her, but then she abandoned him, and eventually he was taken back to his father and Rusty James. She now lives out in California and apparently is still unstable, moving from relationship to relationship. When the Motorcycle Boy finds her, she's living with a movie producer but is thinking of "moving in with an artist who lived in a tree house up in the mountains."

Coach Ryan

Ryan is the gym teacher at Rusty James's school. Rusty James dislikes him because he thinks the coach is a phony. The coach uses teen slang and tries too hard to be friends with Rusty James, which makes Rusty James suspicious. Rusty James says, "I hoped to hell when I was grown I'd have better things to do than hang around some tough punk, hoping his rep would rub off on me."

Steve

Steve is Rusty James's best friend and, like Rusty James, is fourteen. He looks like he's twelve and acts forty. According to Rusty James, "he could say stuff that I wouldn't let anybody else get away with." He comes from a good family and is scared of violence. He is shy with girls, doesn't smoke, and doesn't drink until later in the novel. He has "dark-blond hair and dark-brown eyes and a face like a real sincere rabbit." He is, according to Rusty James, smarter than Rusty James. Rusty James protects him from other people who want to beat him up and listens to his many worries. In exchange, Steve does Rusty James's math homework and lets Rusty James copy his history homework so Rusty James won't flunk. However, this is not the only reason Rusty James is close to him. Rusty James says, "Maybe it was because I had known him longer than I'd known anybody I wasn't related to." Steve's parents, on the other hand, don't even know that he knows Rusty James.

Biff Wilcox

Biff is a member of another group, formerly allies of Rusty James's group, now enemies. Rusty James notes that if the old gang wars were still going on, Biff would be leader of his gang, the Dev-ilhawks. He is tougher and more dangerous than most kids.

Themes

Poverty

Although Steve and Rusty James agree that their neighborhood is not "the slums," they note that it's "crummy." They live in a poor area. Steve's family is better off because his father apparently has a job, but Rusty James and the Motorcycle Boy have to scavenge, steal, and hope their father won't drink up all of his welfare check before they get a piece of it. When Rusty James is hungry, he finds some sardines, crackers, and milk in the kitchen, remarking, "I ain't picky. I like about anything." The reader gets the sense that there was how I feel. Jivey, juiced up, just alive. The lights, I mean, and all the people." In contrast, nothing else in the book causes him to vary from his heavy emotional tone. Going to the lake with friends or making out with his girlfriend don't provide the pleasure that it seems they should; these are all just things to do to fill in time.

One of the most interesting aspects of Rusty James's alienation and emotional homelessness is that no one in their apartment has his own room or even his own bed. The apartment has a cot and a mattress, and Rusty James, the Motorcycle Boy, and his father sleep on either of them. "It didn't matter which," Rusty James says. The reader is given the sense that they don't need three places to sleep because it's very rare that all three of them are home at the same time. There's no comfort in their house, very little food, and no stable routine. Their father is not interested in their lives, except for feeling mild curiosity about their exploits, and is completely emotionally detached from them, never providing meals, guidance, or a stable presence. As a parent, he's a total failure, so that, although he's physically present, he has emotionally abandoned both his sons.

Although Rusty James's father has done this, Rusty James still loves him, "sort of." He decides that he loves Patty, the Motorcycle Boy, and Steve, "sort of." In the end, his father proves worthless, Patty leaves him, the Motorcycle Boy is killed, and Steve decides that he's had enough of the rough and dangerous life and chooses to turn away from Rusty James. Rusty James is left utterly alone, just as he was as a young boy.

Death in Life

Everyone in the book, with the exception of Steve, is dead on the inside—trapped, stagnant, going nowhere. The Motorcycle Boy is doomed, "born in the wrong era, on the wrong side of the river, with the ability to do anything and finding nothing he wants to do," according to his father. In addition, he's now partially deaf and color-blind as a result of all his fighting and motorcycle crashes, disabilities that further cut him off from others and limit his potential. He is not interested in overcoming these problems. He almost seems to enjoy the splendid isolation they give him.

Rusty James is trapped by his blind admiration for the Motorcycle Boy and never gives a thought to his future or to his past, and his awareness of the present is like an

animal's, not involving any reflection or thought. He comments that he has never not much else in the house, other than his father's bottles of "sneaky pete."

Alienation and Abandonment

"For a tough kid I had a bad habit of getting attached to people," Rusty James says in the beginning of the book, and as the story progresses, the reader finds out why. Abandoned by his mother as a toddler, left alone by his father for three days while his father went on a drunken binge, he learned early to fear solitude and at the same time to be wary of other people. His biggest fear, throughout the book, is that the Motorcycle Boy will leave for good.

The only time in the book when Rusty James says he feels truly alive is when he, Steve, and the Motorcycle Boy cross the river and find themselves among crowds of people, cruising cars and listening to music. Rusty James says, "I couldn't explain been good at school, and, indeed, his consciousness seems, at times, almost like that of a zombie. When the Motorcycle Boy tells him that he is afraid to be alone because he was frightened by being abandoned as a little child, Rusty James looks at him stupidly. He says, "What he was saying didn't make any sense to me. Trying to understand it was like trying to see through fog." He seems to spend most of his time in this fog, just getting through the days, never really thinking too deeply about anything.

Their father is also emotionally detached and dead, interested in his next drink, but not particularly in his children. He occasionally shows flashes of understanding, as when he describes the Motorcycle Boy's character, but usually regards his sons with utter detachment; for example, when Rusty James is wounded in the knife fight, he only remarks mildly, "What strange lives you two lead." Instead of remarking on the wound or encouraging Rusty James to seek medical care for it, he gives Rusty James ten dollars and then asks the Motorcycle Boy if he had a nice trip to California. This makes it clear that no matter what happens, the boys are basically on their own. Their father is unable, or unwilling, to help them or provide any guidance.

Usually a symbol of life and movement, the river in *Rumble Fish* is the opposite, as stagnant and doomed as the characters. Early in the book, Rusty James throws his cigarette butt into the water, remarking that it's so full of trash that it will make no difference. Later, he comments on the horrible smell that emanates from the river, a result of pollution. The fact that the Motorcycle Boy decides to release the fighting fish into this river is ironic—they will likely die as soon as they hit the filthy water. It's a grand gesture but a senseless one, and like the fish, these boys will never escape the evils of their environment.

Style

First-Person Narrative

The book is written in first person from Rusty James's point of view, which allows the reader to see events only as Rusty James sees them, leading to some interesting questions about Rusty James's perception and how much of it is accurate. In particular, it's not clear whether his suspicions of some adults are correct or not. For example, he is cynical about Cassandra and her motives and doesn't trust her because she gave up her rich family to come and live in his bad neighborhood and follow his brother around. He is also suspicious of Coach Ryan because Ryan is friendly with him. Although it's clear that both Coach Ryan and Cassandra have problems and motives of their own, readers may wonder whether they're as bad, or as selfish or phony, as Rusty James thinks they are.

In addition, the one-sided presentation of events from Rusty James's perspective is poignant because readers may see the gaps and flaws in his reasoning when he does not. He wants more than anything to be like his brother, but from the reader's point of view, this ambition is questionable: his brother has accomplished nothing, is going nowhere, and has lost both his color vision and his hearing through his own lack of good judgment. And although the Motorcycle Boy is apparently a natural leader, it's clear that he will never really use this gift for anything constructive because he is so emotionally damaged. This sad fact is lost on Rusty James. Although in many other ways he seems much older than his fourteen years, in his unswerving admiration of his brother, he seems much younger.

Use of Slang

The book is written in a tough, breezy style, as Rusty James would speak but without any curse words. It seems unbelievable that the characters in the book would not curse, but obviously Hinton could not depict their talk realistically and have the book published for a young-adult audience. Instead, she implies cursing, as when Rusty James says, "I said something to her I wouldn't normally say to a chick, but she really got on my nerves. She didn't flinch."

In addition, with rare exceptions, Hinton avoids using any slang that would make the book unnecessarily dated. Although it was written in 1975, most of the dialogue could appear in a book now and pass unnoticed. The few exceptions are largely street names for drugs—bennies, sneaky pete, horse—which typically undergo rapid evolution.

Historical Context

Rumble Fish was published in 1975, but Hinton wrote it during the early 1970s. At the time, the Vietnam War was still raging, and the war polarized the American population between those who supported it and those who vehemently protested against it. The U.S. government finally withdrew its last troops from combat in 1973, but the war left lasting scars on the psyches of everyone, from the soldiers involved to those who had never left home. In all, 3 million soldiers participated in the war; 58,000 were killed, 1,000 were missing and never found, and 304,000 were wounded.

The growing use of drugs by young people, which became popular in the 1960s, continued in the 1970s, affecting people of every social class. In 1975, First Lady Betty Ford commented in an interview that she thought her own children had smoked marijuana.

The Civil Rights and feminist movements were still fighting for equal rights for minorities and women. Although many women supported the feminist movement, its effects were slow to trickle throughout American culture so that, like the girls in *Rumble Fish*, many women still felt that their status was derived from that of the man they were with. And although great strides had been made toward ensuring equal rights to people of all races, racial tensions still divided society, as shown by Rusty James's unease at realizing that he and Steve are the only white boys in a black bar.

In world politics, the United States and the Soviet Union were superpower nations, each with influence or control over a large portion of the world. The two nations regarded each other with unease, suspicion, and a constant wariness, a situation known as the "Cold War." Conflict between communism and American democracy weighed on people's minds, along with the constant awareness that any open war between the two powers might end in nuclear annihilation. This tension was eased slightly in 1975 by the symbolic linking of the Soviet Soyuz and the American Apollo spacecraft while in orbit.

Economically, the United States experienced a serious recession from about 1973 to 1975, largely caused by rising oil prices. This recession was the most serious contraction of industrial production since the Great Depression and had widespread effects on employment and attitudes throughout the country.

Culturally, the options for entertainment and connection to other people were much less diverse than they are today. Most cities had only a handful of television stations, unlike the dozens or hundreds of cable channels available to many people today. Videogames, video players, personal computers, e-mail, and the Internet were unknown; even hand-held calculators were an expensive novelty.

Critical Overview

In *School Library Journal*, Jane Abramson commented that the book was "stylistically superb" and that it "packs a punch that will leave readers of any age reeling." A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer wrote, "Ms. Hinton is a brilliant novelist," and Margery Fisher, in *Growing Point*, noted, "Once more in the American urban scene is a book as uncompromising in its view of life as it is disciplined." She also wrote, "Of the three striking books by this young author, *Rumble Fish* seems the most carefully struc-

tured and the most probing." Jay Daly wrote in *Presenting S. E. Hinton*, "In the end we respond to *Rumble Fish* in a much deeper way than we do to [her previous book] *That Was Then, This Is Now*. It's an emotional, almost a physical response, as opposed to the more rational, intellectual reaction that the other book prompted." He also commented that the book "works as a novel.... And there is a name usually given to this kind of success. It is called art."

However, not all critics agreed that the book was superb. In the *Nation*, Michael Malone remarked that he found it difficult to believe that Hinton's novels, including *Rumble Fish*, are realistic portraits of average American teenagers. He commented that the books' popularity is largely due to their action-packed narratives, simplistic plot structures, intense emotional tone, and well-defined principles. He noted that adults are rarely present and that girls also play only vague cameo roles: "In this world the stories, like the streets, belong almost exclusively to tribes of adolescent males."

In her defense, Hinton commented in an interview in *Seventeen*:

> I started writing before the women's movement was in full swing, and at the time, people wouldn't have believed that girls would do the things that I was writing about. I also felt more comfortable with the male point of view—I had grown up around boys.

Malone commented that he was mystified by others' claims that *Rumble Fish* and Hinton's other books are realistic and that, in his opinion, because of their lack of reality, "despite their modern, colloquial tone, [Hinton's books] are fairy tale adventures" and the gang fights in them are "as exotic as jousts in *Ivanhoe* or pirate wars in *Treasure Island*."

To bolster his case that the novels are mythic, he noted that the settings are vague; the action could take place anywhere. In addition, the novels' setting in time is also hard to pin down.

Malone also described Hinton's prose style as being at times "fervid, mawkish and ornate" and said that the morals in her fictional universe are "as black-and-white as an old cowboy film."

In the *Times Literary Supplement*, Jane Pow-ell commented that the book is disappointing because of Rusty James's victimization and his evidently doomed fate. As she notes, by the end of the book, "There can't even be a glimmer of hope for the future."

Hinton revealed in the production notes to the film version of the book that the book was difficult to write because of the contrast between Rusty James, who is a simple character, and the Motorcycle Boy, who "is the most complex character I've ever created. . . . It's about over-identifying with something which you can never understand, which is what Rusty James is doing. The Motorcycle Boy can't identify with anything."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
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Critical Essay #1

Winters is a freelance writer. In this essay, Winters considers Hinton's depiction of girls, boys, young adults, and adults in her novel.

Hinton has often been criticized for the emphasis on male toughness and machismo in her books. In *Rumble Fish*, the portrayal of Patty and other girls is simplistic; the reader never really gets a sense of Patty as a living, breathing person, and she seems mainly interested in her appearance and in going out with the toughest boy. Hinton once explained that she grew up before the feminist movement, that the girls she knew in high school were more concerned with their hair and makeup than anything else, and that girls derived their status not from who they were but from who their boyfriends were. This is borne out by the action in the book. When the balance of power shifts so that Smokey is top dog in the group, Patty coolly shifts her affections to him without a backward glance.

This makes her seem shallow, which she is, but so is Rusty James's affection for her; at one point, kissing the top of her head, he notes that she has dark roots in her hair. He comments, "I like blond girls. I don't care how they got that way." The reader senses that it's not so much her personality—of which she doesn't have much—that attracts him but simply that she's female, blond, and likes him. At one point, he includes her in a list of people he loves, but he's unmoved by her defection to Smokey at the end of the book, even though this was prompted by Smokey's deception.

Other than Patty, girls are rarely mentioned in the book. Although he's incredulous that Steve, at fourteen, would be shy about girls, for Rusty James, they're still barely a blip on his mental radar screen. Girls are just there, like furniture. When he goes to the lake, he names the boys he goes with but says, "There were some girls and we built a fire and went swimming." The text implies that he kissed or made out with the girls but that it didn't mean anything to him; whatever happened, he's already forgotten it; it was just something he did, and the girls didn't even have names or personalities.

In addition, the degree of male toughness or machismo in the book seems exaggerated, leading to unrealistic behavior. Rusty James is just fourteen, and he's been deeply wounded emotionally throughout his life, but he's as tough as a hardened Marine when it comes to physical suffering. After sustaining a knife slash deep enough to expose his ribs, he just grits his teeth when his brother pours alcohol over the wound and goes to school the next day. He doesn't even bandage it, even though the wound is obviously deep enough to require stitches and the pain would inhibit most people from moving around at all. All he says is, "I wasn't feeling too hot and I was bleeding off and on, but I usually go to school if I can." It seems unbelievable that he wouldn't simply stay home, especially since his father doesn't care and he is not close to any of his teachers. After school, he goes out and shoots a game of pool, seemingly oblivious to his wound, and runs for blocks and leaps from one roof to another after stealing some hubcaps. During the chase he becomes aware of the pain: "My side was killing me." And later, after the

rooftop leap, he finally passes out. What's surprising is that he didn't pass out sooner and that he didn't remark on the pain while bending over to shoot pool.

The next day he washes out the wound again, noting, "It hurt real steady, not bad, but steady like a toothache." That night he goes swimming up at the lake and only later wonders if the lake water might have infected the wound. It seems unlikely that the wound wouldn't have hurt when the water touched it or when he swam, possibly reopening it. Throughout the book, his awareness of the wound comes and goes, but it never affects him the way one would assume it would affect any normal person.

The main characters in the book are all teenagers—the Motorcycle Boy is nineteen, Biff Wilcox is sixteen, and Rusty James and Steve are fourteen. However, they are as burned-out and jaded as any war-ravaged adults. Rusty James says casually, "I get annoyed when people want to kill me for some stupid little reason. Something big, and I don't mind it so much." This implies that others have wanted to kill him, and for various reasons; death threats mean nothing to him now. When threatened, he reacts without thinking about much other than how many supporters his enemy has brought with him.

Similarly, Rusty James is jaded about sex and women. He treats Patty like an object, and when he goes to an X-rated movie with the Motorcycle Boy and Steve, he spends much of his time watching the other people in the theater, the Motorcycle Boy, and Steve, who is amazed at what's on the screen. He's seen so much of it before that the film seems unremarkable to him; he tells Steve, "I seen better."

Because his father is a drunk, Rusty James is familiar with the effects of alcohol, and he has friends who use hard drugs like heroin; he stops over at a friend's house but leaves when he finds the friend is shooting up. "He was there, with some other people, but they were all spacey and nervous and dopey, doing horse." This is apparently a normal occurrence in his neighborhood; he reports it in the same tone anyone else would use to say, "They were home, but they were busy cleaning, so I left."

At times, Rusty James gives the reader the sense that he wishes he could be a kid and that he resents the adults who have left him to grow up so fast. He claims to love his father although he doesn't like him, but in a telling incident, he shoves an old drunk man off the sidewalk because the old man is in his way. Although the old man is not his father, he could easily be; the reader senses that the anger he feels at the old man for blocking his way is really aimed at his father, for blocking his growth in life. As he points out, his father has never "done" anything to him, like beat him or abuse him; his father has simply done nothing: he drinks and reads and ignores his sons. What Rusty James doesn't really understand, however, is that "doing nothing" is as harmful to children as physical abuse, and he has every right to be angry at his father.

Coach Ryan, who is friendly to Rusty James, turns out to be unethical when he offers Rusty James five dollars to beat up another boy. Rusty James has never trusted him, because he thinks Ryan is impressed by Rusty James's toughness and wants to gain from his reputation; he thinks Ryan wants to be friends with him in the same way that

some one might like to own a mean and vicious dog because it will enhance his own status.

Mr. Harrigan, the guidance counselor, does not offer guidance at all but seems more like a warden. He doesn't make any effort to find out why Rusty James acts the way he does but punishes him and eventually gives him an ultimatum: Rusty James is going to be transferred to a school where they know how to deal with "his kind." Rusty James says of Harrigan, "My mind went kind of blank. There was something about Mr. Harrigan that made my mind go kind of blank, even when he was swatting me with a board, like he had two or three times before."

Harrigan asks a typically adult question: "Don't you think it's time you gave some serious thought to your life?" Rusty James thinks, "Well, I had to worry about money, and whether or not the old man would drink up his check before I got part of it, and whether or not the Motorcycle Boy would pick up and leave for good, and I had a cop itching to blow my brains out." These are all serious worries, and, ironically, Rusty James's focus on them is what prevents him from thinking about his life the way society would want him to; he can't care about school or the normal youthful things because he's had these problems thrust upon him by irresponsible adults. Obviously, Harrigan is just spouting the adult authority figure "party line" instead of really trying to get to the bottom of the problem.

Cassandra is closer in age to Rusty James than any other adults, but, like them, she's abdicated any real adult responsibility by following the Motorcycle Boy around and becoming a drug addict. She's a substitute teacher, but her behavior suggests that if and when she becomes a full-time teacher, she'll be just like Harrigan and Ryan, so steeped in her own problems that she's unable to help her young students toward learning, emotional health, and true maturity.

Source: Kelly Winters, Critical Essay on *Rumble Fish*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Daly explores the structure and themes Hinton employs to develop the characters and their relationships to each other in Rumble Fish.

Critical Essay #3

As she did in *The Outsiders*, Hinton employs a frame to the story, the main body of which is a series of events that occurred five years earlier. The story is framed by the first and last chapters, which

describe the surprise meeting of Rusty James, the book's narrator, and Steve Hays, who had been his best friend during the time the story describes. The story is, in effect, a piece of Rusty James's memory, and memory, the ability to remember things (or, conversely, to forget them) is a concern that appears throughout the narrative.

There is not much cause and effect in this story. In *The Outsiders* there is a random element to the act of violence that triggers the story—the stabbing in the park—but once that has occurred the rest of the story proceeds with absolute fidelity to the motivations of its characters. Once Johnny stabs Bob, everyone behaves exactly as they would be expected to behave, and the story gathers momentum toward its proper conclusion. In *Rumble Fish* there is no such turning point, no crucial act or omission (unless it is the simple returning to town of the Motorcycle Boy) after which the action of the story becomes inevitable. Instead it is all random, and it is all inevitable. Like a Greek tragedy dressed in modern black leather and denim, *Rumble Fish* is the story of human subservience to fate, to a destiny over which, finally, there can be no control.

We receive all our information in the story through the consciousness of Rusty James. As with Ponyboy in *The Outsiders* and Bryon in *That Was Then, This Is Now*, this is the narrator's story, filtered through the narrator's point of view. Once again, this technique of first-person narrative permits an immediate involvement on the part of the reader. With Rusty James we are struck from the beginning by his basic honesty and ingenuousness. "I ain't never been a particularly smart person," he tells us. "But I get along all right." Despite his submission to the macho world in which he lives ("I get mad quick, and I get over it quick"), his voice is a voice whose candor we trust. If we know at times that he is fooling himself we never feel that he is trying to fool us; this adds poignancy to some of his comments about himself, where the war between his outer toughness and his inner sensitivity seems to be proceeding without his notice. "For a tough kid," he says, "I had a bad habit of getting attached to people." In the early stages of the book, in fact, his teenage braggadocio is both entertaining and revealing:

I get annoyed when people want to kill me for some stupid little reason. Something big, and I don't mind it so much.
I'm always in dumb classes. In grade school they start separating dumb people from smart people and it only takes you a couple of years to figure out which one you are.

We can't help but feel that, with an attitude like this, he is not quite so dumb and uncomplicated as he makes himself out to be. As a result we warm up to him further.

In addition to this quality of immediacy, there are two other attributes of the first-person narrative that are of particular importance in *Rumble Fish*. The first is that it must often operate by suggestion. It must somehow transfer to the reader an awareness that is not yet present in the mind of the narrator. Rusty James's relationship with his girl-friend Patty is a useful example of this. She treats him like a yo-yo, leading him on and then suddenly breaking up with him. Despite this treatment, he continues to believe that they share what he has been told is love. "I wondered if I loved anybody," he asks himself, and answers, "Patty, for sure." But in the very same paragraph we read: "Then I thought of people I could really count on, and couldn't come up with anybody."

In similar fashion, his preoccupation with appearance, with his looking like the Motorcycle Boy, or like his mother, and with sight, vision, builds up throughout the book until it pays catastrophic dividends at the end. We can feel it coming, because of the accumulation of evidence that has made us sensitive to it, but Rusty James, whose "loyalty is his only vice," doesn't see it coming until it runs him down.

It is interesting to note that, since this story is so obviously a memory, recalled in its entirety in later times, there should be in the voice of the narrator some indication that he is speaking from an older, wiser vantage. It is common to stick phrases like "if I knew then what I know now," or "I couldn't have been more wrong," at strategic spots, usually near the end of chapters, to push the story along. Hinton in fact uses this device in *The Outsiders*; at the end of chapter 3 Ponyboy thinks: "Things gotta get better, I figured. They couldn't get worse. I was wrong."

In *Rumble Fish* there is a curious absence of this older-but-wiser voice. The reader accepts this inconsistency without complaint, in part because of the natural complicity of the reader and the author on behalf of the story, but there is more to it. There is a clear sense from the beginning chapter that Rusty James is still not in complete possession of "the truth" of his story, that he has instead been running away from it. We get the sense that he is confronting this story for the first time, that it is as new to him as it is to us. The immediacy of the first-person narrative allows us to share along with him the pain and perplexity of his discovery.

The third quality of first-person narration that is important here is its ability to capture in the emotion of the narrator the mood of the times. The sense of confusion, of helplessness in the narrator renders the novel's theme of blind fate and destiny far more effectively than description ever could. As Rusty James proceeds through the book his voice changes subtly. His apparent arrogance at the beginning ("Pain don't scare me much" □) becomes eroded, and the uncertainty of the murky world he sees around him begins to break through his rather fragile self-confidence. "All my life, all I had to worry about was real things, things you could touch, or punch, or run away from. I had been scared before, but it was always something real to be scared of—not having any money, or some big kid looking to beat you up, or wondering if the Motorcycle Boy was gone for

good. I didn't like this being scared of something and not knowing exactly what it was. I couldn't fight it if I didn't know what it was."

At last he discovers that "nothing was like I thought it was □ everything was changed," but in this he is not entirely correct. In fact nothing has changed, everything is exactly as it was; the only change is his awareness of it, an awareness that had crept into the reader's imagination much earlier, as the tone of the novel shifted ever so gradually from teenage braggadocio to human helplessness.

Because *Rumble Fish* is such an elusive, dreamy book, progress in the story is made by an accretion of awarenesses, a repetition of imagery. It is not so much a question of events turning uncontrollable as it is a growing awareness that events have always been out of the characters' control. The references to time and memory (as instigators of the characters' present lives), to the fleeting color and dreary monotone of life, to insanity and vision, to Greek tragedy and the idea of destiny, all of these gather strength as the novel progresses until the resolution of the story is quite beyond the ability of the characters to change it.

Like the colorful Siamese fighting fish, the Motorcycle Boy, and, to an extent we don't at first realize, his brother, Rusty James, are trapped by a kind of biological necessity. Victims of their own destiny, of circumstances over which they had no say, their options for the future are very much the classical hero's options. They can, like the Motorcycle Boy, make the Promethean choice—to steal the fire, set free the fish—and suffer the inevitable Promethean punishment of the gods. Or, like Rusty James, they can try to endure, but this latter choice—to live on in a world stripped of meaning, a world uncolored by hope—is in many ways the more difficult of the two. "I figured if I didn't see [Steve], I'd start forgetting again," Rusty James says. "But it's been taking me longer than I thought it would." It may take him the rest of his life.

Critical Essay #4

The most striking and persistent image of the book is certainly that of color and monotone, and of vision in general (with all that the word implies). Part of the reason that the movie version offended those of more delicate sensibility was that it took this central metaphor of the book and turned it into a much more visual presence in the film. The film is shot in black-and-white, mimicking the color-blind world of the Motorcycle Boy, with only the fish, bright red and blue, colored individually onto the screen. The result was either blatant exhibitionism (for those who hated the film) or movie magic (for those who loved it).

The contrast between color and monotone is much more subtly handled in the book. The Motorcycle Boy, that model of perfection in the world of *Rumble Fish*, is color-blind. His color blindness is not just a problem with red and green; it is total. The world to him looks like "Black-and-white TV, I guess That's it." Hinton's decision to bestow upon this larger-than-life figure the curious imperfection of color blindness is, I think, inspired, and it reflects the enchantment of this particular book, as well as the levels of meaning with which it operates in the reader.

Our first reaction to the color blindness is that it sets the Motorcycle Boy apart from the ordinary. It is, after all, a relatively uncommon condition. Furthermore, it is a condition with hereditary connotations, the kind of malady, like hemophilia, that besets royal houses, a condition of imperfection that at the same time suggests a privileged blood line. And of course the question of heredity, of propinquity, is a recurring obsession with this family, and with Rusty James in particular. He is forever wondering who looks like whom in the family, and who has inherited what from each of his parents. It is of extreme importance to him that he find a permanent spot in the hopelessly dispersed and unresponsive family lineage represented by his absent mother and his functionally absent father.

Rusty James yearns most of all for a merging with his brother, but the color blindness is a clear and constant reminder of how dissimilar they are. Rusty James loves color. He loves the colored lights of the city because for him they represent life in all its vibrant potential. He's proud of the uncommon color of his hair, "an odd shade of dark red, like black-cherry pop." In one of his better lines, early in the book, he says, "I like blond girls. I don't care how they get that way."

Color is an important symbol of life for Rusty James but he would give it up in a minute (just as he would kill to have someone finally say that he resembles his brother) for the more profound message of color blindness. The color blindness of the Motorcycle Boy is a sign that he is one of the Elect, the special ones, and Rusty James mistakes this sign of exceptionality for the designation he truly seeks, that of belonging. Rusty James will grasp at straws, and it is only at the end of the book, when in an earth-shattering moment he is allowed to participate in his brother's tragic imperfection, that the bleak reality of the Motorcycle Boy's vision becomes apparent to him.

All of this would have justified Hinton's use of the motif of color blindness and assured it a central place in the novel. The weight of the metaphor goes deeper, though, and it finally defines the world of *Rumble Fish* as surely as it marks the character of the Motorcycle Boy.

"Sometimes," the Motorcycle Boy says, "it seems to me that I can remember colors, 'way back when I was a little kid. That was a long time ago." This wistful comment suggests that the Motorcycle Boy's color blindness is not a congenital condition at all. It suggests instead that this vision of his is something he's attained, a product of his life. Whether his attainment of this vision is to be considered a gift or a deprivation is not clear. What is clear is that, in *Rumble Fish* at least, the world of light and color that Rusty James so admires is exposed as an illusion, a child's vision, and the monotone world of the Motorcycle Boy is the reality.

The Motorcycle Boy is the classical hero turned upside down. He's the "perfect knight," the "pagan prince," who sees into the heart of things, "the laughter shining dark out of his eyes." "[The Motorcycle Boy] saw things other people couldn't see, and laughed when nothing was funny. He had strange eyes—they made me think of a two way mirror. Like you could feel somebody on the other side watching you, but the only reflection you saw was your own."

Like Mr. Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the Motorcycle Boy has seen too deeply into the secrets of things, into a reality that is gray and desperate. He has seen too much to be able to live a normal life in the world of colored lights and party sounds. In fact, like the tragic hero of that earlier book, he has seen too much to be able to live at all.

The book itself gradually takes on his vision. Things become murky, and motivations blurred. It culminates in Rusty James's finally getting what he has so devoutly wished for, a merging of his identity with that of his idolized brother, in the penultimate scene by the river. This scene is rendered in such a way that one can only see it as a case of the curtain being suddenly torn open, revealing the brutal reality behind it. "The next thing I knew I was thrown up against a police car and frisked. I stared straight ahead at the flashing light. There was something really wrong with it. I was scared to think about what was wrong with it, but I knew, anyway. It was gray. . . . Everything was black and white and gray. It was as quiet as a graveyard . . . 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."

Hinton's deft handling of imagery and symbol does not confine itself to color and vision. The river, which divides the main part of the city from the boys' neighborhood, becomes a powerful symbol of their life, their world. The Motorcycle Boy stares into the river, as if looking for messages. Rusty James thinks that the river stinks; he'd just as soon get away from it. The contrast to the river is, of course, the ocean, which the Motorcycle Boy had the chance to see (and didn't) in California and which entrances Rusty James. "No kidding," he says of the Motorcycle Boy's trip to California. "The ocean and everything" "Kid," the Motorcycle Boy responds, cryptically, "I never got past the river." It is significant that when the Motorcycle Boy decides to liberate the rumble fish from their

glass bowls (recalling the glass bubble in which he lives) he wants to see "if they'd act that way (destroy one another) in the river." His dramatic attempt to release the Siamese fighting fish is an effort not to save them, or even to free them, really; it is merely the preparation for the real test, the trial by combat. The Motorcycle Boy is not much interested in their salvation; he is more interested in measuring how their colorful belligerence, their legendary powers of self-destruction perform in the real world, in his monotone world of the river. Ironically, neither he nor the fish are permitted to complete this test. Rusty James is there to watch. "I was at a dead run at the first shot, and almost to the river by the second. So I was there when they turned him over, and he was smiling, and the little rumble fish were flipping and dying around him, still too far from the river." This is an impressive image, reminiscent of the Viking funeral in *Beau Geste* (the name in French means beautiful, but empty, act), the larger-than-life hero and his totem dying together on the banks of that dark river.

The totemic relationship between the Motorcycle Boy and the rumble fish brings us to one last observation on the sustained imagery of the novel. There is in *Rumble Fish* a continued effort to imply animal surrogates for nearly all the main characters. Hinton had done this in other novels (Mark the lion, notably, in *That Was Then, This Is Now*), but there is in no other Hinton book the relentless identification of people with specific animals. Early on, Rusty James notes that "the animals reminded me of people. Steve looked like a rabbit. He had □ a face like a real sincere rabbit." This is a descriptive image, used once, but Hinton does not seem to want us to forget this identification. On the roof after the hubcap escapade Steve looks like a rabbit again, and, later, after his mother has gone into the hospital, he "looked like a sincere rabbit about to take on a pack of wolves."

The other characters have their own animal descriptors. The Motorcycle Boy "looked like a panther or something." When Steve shows his displeasure at something the Motorcycle Boy says, he looks like "a rabbit scowling at a panther." The picture of the Motorcycle Boy in the magazine "made him look like a wild animal out of the woods."

The Motorcycle Boy is, fittingly, associated with the panther, exotic and sleek, while Rusty James is compared most often with a more familiar and domestic creature: a dog. He feels "the hairs of my neck starting to bristle, like a dog's." After he's nearly killed by muggers he makes "a grunt that sounded like a kicked dog." This identification is part of his self-image, and it is revealing to note that, among all the animals he could have chosen, he chooses the common, loyal, unremarkable dog. Even sadder is the animal the Motorcycle Boy assigns to him, the chameleon, which changes its very appearance to suit its environment and thus belongs everywhere, and nowhere.

Besides being graphic and descriptive (who can help picturing Steve as the sincere rabbit or the Motorcycle Boy as the sleek panther?), the association with animals reemphasizes the primacy of fate and destiny in the lives of the characters. What choice does an animal have in being what it is? Hinton's continued introduction of animal references also prefigures the final scene, where the Motorcycle Boy frees all the animals and casts his lot with the rumble fish.

At first glance the rumble fish seem to come out of nowhere. Their existence isn't even mentioned until the very end of the book. How is it that they are suddenly thrust into a position of such crucial importance, prominent enough to give the book its title?

The answer is that their role has been suggested all along, their existence predicted as surely as if Cassandra, the Motorcycle Boy's girlfriend (who is associated with cats, the animal symbol of prophecy), had gone into a white-eyed trance and begun raving about them. It wouldn't have mattered anyway, if she had. In Greek mythology Cas-sandra is given the gift of prophecy and then punished by Apollo, who ensures that nothing she says, no disaster she correctly predicts, will be believed by anyone who hears her. In *Rumble Fish*, where destiny is forever unalterable, the mythical punishment remains in effect.

Critical Essay #5

There are characters in all the Hinton novels who appear to be victims of a destiny they are not able to escape. This destiny may be the product of an accident of birth or a quirk of society (or a combination of both) but whatever the cause, it is usually final, and often fatal. Dallas Winston in *The Outsiders* is doomed from the first time we meet him; he can't escape his fate because it is a part of himself. Neither, apparently, can Mark in *That Was Then, This Is Now*, although his case is a little less satisfactory. In her fourth book, *Tex*, the entire cast of characters lines up behind placards reading "Those Who Go and Those Who Stay"; once it's decided which they are (a gypsy fortune-teller may make the decision) their fate is sealed. "Will and fate," Travis asks himself in *Taming the Star Runner*, "Which one had the biggest say in your life?"

A similar situation exists in *Rumble Fish*. Rusty James, whom Steve compares to "a ball in a pinball machine," has given up on his ability to make decisions about his life before the story even begins. Biff Wilcox wants to kill him; Patty wants to break up with him; nothing he can do about it. That's just the way things are. It is instructive to remember just how trivial the so-called causes of these two major rifts are. In the first case he is almost killed as a result of "something [he] said to Anita at school." Who's Anita, anyway? In the second case he loses Patty, someone he professes to love, over an incident at the lake that is of such importance that it occupies one full sentence in the book. Why doesn't he fight back? Why doesn't he even try to make his case with Patty?

He doesn't try because he has come to believe that it won't do any good. Things are what they are, and nothing he can do will change that.

Rusty James does have aspirations, of course, but they involve magical transformations rather than effort on his part. It is his hope that he will someday be like the Motorcycle Boy, and he bases this hope on heredity. Biology is destiny for Rusty James, or at least he hopes it is.

"We look just like each other," I said.
"Who?"
"Me an' the Motorcycle Boy."
"Naw."
"Yeah, we do."
The Motorcycle Boy was the coolest person in the whole world. Even if he hadn't been my brother he would have been the coolest person in the whole world.
And I was going to be just like him.

The irony, unfortunately, is that he succeeds. Biology becomes destiny, although it is necessarily an imperfect copy. Steve makes the connection in the two frame chapters at the beginning and end of the book:

"Rusty James you gave me a real scare when I first saw you. I thought I'd flipped out. You know who I thought you were for a second? You know who you look just like?
"I never thought you would, but you do. You don't sound like him, though. Your voice is completely different. It's a good thing you never went back. You'd probably give half the people in the neighborhood a heart attack."

Critical Essay #6

Rusty James, the tough kid with the bad habit of getting attached to people, is one of Hinton's most ingenuous, most likable creations. He is indeed as loyal as a pet dog, and equally incapable of guile. He can't even play poker because (though he doesn't agree) his friends can read his every emotion in his face. It is therefore all the more tragic when he is transfigured (in an operation only partly successful, like a botched job done by a mad scientist in a horror movie) into the cold, featureless persona of the Motorcycle Boy. All he ever wanted was to belong. Somewhere. Anywhere.

His need for other people, his yearning to belong somewhere, permeates the consciousness of the book. Hinton's characters have always had a bad start at belonging—most of them have dead, absent, or ineffectual parents—but for none of them is the need for a place in life, amongst other people, as strong as it is for Rusty James. For Rusty James it is almost a matter of life and death.

I can't stand being by myself. That is the only thing I am honest-to-God scared of. "I don't like bein' by myself. I mean, man, I can't stand it. Makes me feel tight, like I'm being choked all over."

There is an ostensible explanation for this fear. It is given by the Motorcycle Boy, in his sometimes exasperating, emotionless monotone. "When you were two years old, and I was six, Mother decided to leave. She took me with her. The old man went on a three-day drunk when he found out. He's told me that was the first time he ever got drunk. I imagined he liked it. Anyway, he left you alone in the house for those three days. We didn't live where we do now. It was a very large house. . . . I suppose you developed your fear of being alone then."

A two-year-old left in the house alone for three days could develop a great many things, including death. The Motorcycle Boy's explanation is a little too pat, a little too convenient. It was a mistake on Hinton's part to imagine that we needed this kind of traumatic antecedent for the pervasive yearning to belong that exists in Rusty James's character. The fact of his mother's abandonment of them would have been quite enough; Rusty James succeeds on his own, in the strength and pure longing of his voice, to convince us of the impact this abandonment has had on him.

The reverse of belonging is, naturally, being alone, and there is no one more alone than the Motorcycle Boy, living in a glass bubble which Rusty James inherits at the end of the book. At the risk of being redundant, we must once again mention the irony: Rusty James, whose very nature is built around the need for people (he makes lists of people he likes, when he's alone, because "it makes me feel good to think of people I like—not so alone") is led by his reverence for the Motorcycle Boy to the precise condition that terrifies him. He is truly and finally alone.

Critical Essay #7

Which brings us to the Motorcycle Boy. The firstborn son of a morganatic marriage between a mysterious, absent, movie-actress mother and a cerebral, formal, lawyer-turned-drunkard father, the Motorcycle Boy comes stocked with all manner of mythic associations. His name, "like a title or something," his ability to crack Biff Wilcox's wrist "like a matchstick," his inherited imperfection, his profound and eerie effect on everyone he encounters, everything about the Motorcycle Boy is of unearthly stature. When the Motorcycle Boy is expelled from school, Rusty James wants to know why.

"How come you got expelled?" I asked. "Perfect tests." You could always feel the laughter around him, just under the surface, but this time it came to the top and he grinned. It was a flash, like lightning, far off. "I handed in perfect semester tests."

Everything about the Motorcycle Boy is preternatural, even his laughter, especially his laughter. "As far as I could tell," Rusty James says, "he never paid any attention to anything except to laugh at it."

"That cat is a prince, man," says the black pool player during his match with the Motorcycle Boy. "He is royalty in exile." This summation is echoed by the boys' father, in his "perfect knight" speech, recalling the archetypal perfect knight, Sir Gala-had, from the Holy Grail legend. Galahad is also gifted with uncommon vision, with the ability to see into the secrets of things, "those things that the heart of mortal man cannot conceive nor tongue relate." Like the Motorcycle Boy, the character of Sir Galahad is often perceived to be "a cardboard saint, [whose] austere virtue excludes humanity." Gala-had succeeds in his quest for the Holy Grail—only a perfect knight can accomplish this—but the Motorcycle Boy's quest is directionless, his goal unidentified, and whether his smile at the end is an indication of the success or the failure of his private quest is open to debate.

The implications, for both the Motorcycle Boy and Rusty James, of their father's "perfect knight" speech are worth considering. "Russell-James," the father says, "every now and then a person comes along who has a different view of the world than does the usual person.... [The Motorcycle Boy] is merely miscast in a play. He would have made a perfect knight, in a different century, or a very good pagan prince in a time of heroes. He was born in the wrong era, on the wrong side of the river, with the ability to do anything and finding nothing he wants to do."

After this speech Rusty James says, in his wide-eyed, great-hearted innocence, once again, "I think I'm gonna look just like him when I get older. Whaddya think?" His father is shocked by this pronouncement, and looks at him as if seeing him for the first time. What he sees startles him, and then reduces him to pity. "You poor child," he says. "You poor baby."

The flip side of the perfect knight is the misfit. The father's "perfect knight" speech could just as easily be called his "misfit" speech, and it applies to Rusty James as well. He,

too, is miscast in the play, born in the wrong era. He, too, is out of touch with the times, though his options are fewer and his "time of heroes" is more recent. With typical misunderstanding, Rusty James locates this heroic time with the era of the gangs, just recently passed, which he imagines would have provided him with meaning, belonging. He even romanticizes that time out of its own chronology; for him the heroic era was "a long time ago, when there were gangs."

His misapprehension of the reality of the gang era doesn't make him any less the misfit in the present time. The lot of the misfit is never a pleasant one. In Flannery O'Connor's short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" there is a chilling, murderous character known only as The Misfit. There is nothing particularly heroic about The Misfit; the only startling thing about him is the utter amorality and the cold expressionlessness with which he goes about the business of murdering, one by one, the members of a family whose car has broken down. At the end of the story The Misfit engages the grandmother of the family in an extended, almost overrational explanation of why he lives as he does in a world where the possibility of redemption, of meaning, is so uncertain. The grandmother, who is doddering in and out of reality, mistakes him in a visionary moment for one of her children and she reaches out to touch him. He recoils in horror and kills her. The last words of the story, spoken in a final attempt at self-justification, by The Misfit, are "It's no real pleasure in life."

The Motorcycle Boy couldn't have said it any better.

Critical Essay #8

Steve says of the Motorcycle Boy, "[H]e is the only person I have ever met who is like somebody out of a book. To look like that, and be good at everything, and all that." Thus does one of the book's characters state the main problem about the Motorcycle Boy: People in books should not themselves appear to come out of books; that's too much of a jump for any character to make, and the Motorcycle Boy, who doesn't make the river at the book's end, doesn't make the jump into fully realized existence either. He's just too distant, too idealized, too detached, and finally, too inhuman to be taken seriously as a character. Robert Berkvist, in his otherwise not very probing review of *Rumble Fish* in the *New York Times Book Review*, makes the entirely accurate observation that the Motorcycle Boy "clanks through the story like a symbol never quite made flesh."

If Hinton thought to introduce some humanity into the character by means of the color blindness (and it is not my belief that she did), the result is quite the opposite. His color blindness, along with his occasional deafness and his general otherworldliness, only serve to set him off further from the rest of humanity. His detachment is so total that he ignores the person closest to him, the person who truly cares about him, his brother, Rusty James.

Numerous times in the novel Rusty James makes statements like "one of the few times he ever paid any attention to me," "he never paid much attention to me," "in case the Motorcycle Boy forgot I was with him," and "the Motorcycle Boy was watching me, amused but not interested." The key is that given the depth of feeling the reader has built up around the character of Rusty James, we should hate this Motorcycle Boy character for the way he treats his hero-struck younger brother. In fact, though, we don't feel much about the Motorcycle Boy, pro or con. We don't feel much because he's not real; it would be like trying to raise an emotion about a lounge chair or a suitcase.

There is the matter of his speech, for one thing. How are we to deal with a character who talks like this? "It's a bit of a burden to be Robin Hood, Jesse James and the Pied Piper. I'd just as soon stay a neighborhood novelty, if it's all the same to you. It's not that I couldn't handle a larger scale, I just plain don't want to."

Hinton tries to have Rusty James explain this away by saying, "Sometimes, usually on the streets, he talked normal. Then sometimes he'd go on like he was reading out of a book, using words and sentences nobody ever used when they were just talking." This just doesn't wash; it's too unreal. The only useful purpose to this kind of speech is that it makes the heredity case once again; it links the Motorcycle Boy with his father, who talks the same way. Compare the father's quizzical "What strange lives you two lead" with the Motorcycle Boy's "What a funny situation I wonder what I'm doing here," after Rusty James is injured in the mugging scene. (A few pages earlier, when Rusty James thought he was dying, he thinks, "I pictured my father at my funeral saying, 'What a strange way to die.'" Rusty James has a talent for capturing the essence of character.)

In Hinton's defense, the problem she bit off when she chose to create the Motorcycle Boy is a problem that not many authors have solved well. The problem of the Motorcycle Boy is the problem of trying to create a larger-than-life character—the saint, the seer, the mystic—and at the same time animating that character with the common spark of humanity we all recognize. (She makes a better choice in *Taming the Star Runner* by placing the symbolic weight on the horse, a character she doesn't have to worry about making human.) Not many writers are able to pull this off. In recent American writing an example of one who tried mightily (and ultimately failed) is J. D. Salinger, with his character Seymour Glass (another idolized older brother). Seymour Glass, who appears in a number of Salinger's books, finally becomes such a prisoner of his spiritual detachment and doomed purity that the reader can't wait for him to do himself in and get it over with. Like Sir Galahad (or David Bowie's Major Tom), Seymour ascends so far into the stratosphere that it becomes clear that he is never coming back down.

Ordinarily this should prove fatal to a novel, a major character who fails to break through two dimensions into at least the suggestion of a rounded existence, but not so in *Rumble Fish*. *Rumble Fish* succeeds in spite of the Motorcycle Boy because *Rumble Fish* is not the Motorcycle Boy's story at all (despite Hinton's comment that "the Motorcycle Boy haunted me" and that he was the reason she forced herself to come back to the book, after it had been put aside for so long). It's Rusty James's story, actually, and from the point of view of the reader's allegiance it is the Motorcycle Boy who plays squire to Rusty James's knight, and not the other way around.

We can forgive the clanking of the Motorcycle Boy because our attention is focused on Rusty James. The spark of humanity that is missing in the Motorcycle Boy is a roaring fire in Rusty James, and it is our concern with this conflagration that gives the book its impact. We imagine that the main thrust of the story is about the Motorcycle Boy, but in this we are fooled (intellectually, not emotionally) by a sleight of hand. As we have seen, upon closer inspection, all the themes of the book, even those having to do with perfection and perfect knighthood, are concerns of the character of Rusty James as well as the Motorcycle Boy. If we sometimes cringe at the behavior of the Motorcycle Boy, we never look away, because in fact it is never the Motorcycle Boy we are truly looking at. What we are looking at is a distorted mirror, "a distorted glass" reflection of Rusty James.

In the end we respond to *Rumble Fish* in a much deeper way than we do to *That Was Then, This Is Now*. It's an emotional, almost a physical response, as opposed to the more rational, intellectual reaction that the other book prompted. Whatever its defects, whatever its ambitions only partly achieved, *Rumble Fish* works as a novel. In its appeal to the mythic element in life, in its living, breathing creation of the pilgrim character of Rusty James, the book works. And there is a name usually given to this kind of success: It is called art.

Source: Jay Daly, "*Rumble Fish*," in *Presenting S. E. Hin-ton*, Twayne, 1987, pp. 68-84.

Adaptations

Rumble Fish was made into a film in 1983 by Francis Ford Coppola, with Matt Dillon as Rusty James and Micky Rourke as the Motorcycle Boy; the film also starred Dennis Hopper, Tom Waits, and Nicolas Cage. Hinton also makes a brief appearance. She and Coppola collaborated to write the screenplay.

The novel was adapted as a record and cassette by Viking in 1977.

Another recording was produced by Recorded Books LLC in 1985.

Topics for Further Study

Some critics of the novel have said that Hinton's portrayal of teenagers is not realistic because the young people in her book are tougher than any real people would be. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Recent statistics show that gang violence is a problem throughout the United States. Do some research to find out what makes young people more likely to join gangs. What does research tell us that young people are looking for when they join gangs?

The Motorcycle Boy is color-blind and sometimes deaf because of all his motorcycle accidents. Find out about color blindness. What is it, who has it, and how do they get it? Is it common for people to have color blindness as a result of accidents?

Hinton has admitted that her portrayal of girls in the book is somewhat out of date. Do you agree with this? Provide specific examples to support your answer.

Compare and Contrast

1970s: Most members of gangs are between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, and it's rare for females to be involved in gang violence.

Today: Gang members may be as young as nine or as old as thirty, and although males still outnumber females by fifteen to one, the number of young women in gangs is increasing.

1970s: Weapons used in gang violence are relatively simple, such as knives and chains, and opposing gang members meet face-to-face to fight.

Today: Gang members may use AK-47s or Uzis, and drive-by shootings have replaced vacant-lot rumbles.

1970s: Fifteen percent of whites and twenty-six percent of African Americans drop out of high school.

Today: Four percent of whites and seven percent of African Americans drop out of high school. Reasons given include "didn't like it," failing, job-related problems, and pregnancy.

1970s: Fewer than half the states in the United States and about one hundred counties in those states report gang violence.

Today: Every state, as well as the District of Columbia, and twelve hundred counties report gang violence.

What Do I Read Next?

Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) tells the story of the rivalry between two gangs.

In *That Was Then, This Is Now* (1971), Hinton depicts two foster brothers who drift apart as one becomes involved with drugs and crime and the other focuses on school.

Hinton's *Tex* (1979) describes two boys who can't rely on their unstable father and turn to each other for support.

Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974) is a story of a boy who resists both a gang and the authority figures at his school.

Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* (1975) depicts two young people, alienated from their families, who turn to an old man for support and become involved in a tragedy.

Further Study

Corliss, Richard, "*Rumble Fish*," Film review, in *Time*, Oc-tober 24, 1983, p. 90.

Corliss reviews the Francis Ford Coppola film version of the novel.

de Montreville, Doris, and Elizabeth J. Crawford, eds., *Fourth Book of Junior Authors*, H. W. Wilson, 1978.

This reference work examines Hinton's life and early work.

Lyons, Gene, "On Tulsa's Mean Streets," in *Newsweek*, Oc-tober 11, 1982, p. 105.

Lyons takes a look at the city where Hinton grew up and how it appears in her fiction.

Silvey, Anita, Review of *Rumble Fish*, in *Horn Book*, November-December 1975, p. 601.

Silvey provides a review and discussion of Hinton's book.

Stanek, Lou Willett, *A Teacher's Guide to the Paperback Editions of the Novels of S. E. Hinton*, Dell, 1980.

This guide examines Hinton's novels from a teacher's perspective.

Sutherland, Zena, "The Teen-Speaks," in *Saturday Review*, January 27, 1968, p. 34.

Sutherland examines Hinton's depiction of teenagers in this article.

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Malone, Michael, "Tough Puppies," in *Nation*, March 8, 1986, pp. 276-80.

Powell, Jane, "Urban Guerrillas," in *Times Literary Supplement*, October 30, 1970, p. 125.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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