

# **That Was Then, This Is Now Study Guide**

**That Was Then, This Is Now by S. E. Hinton**

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# Plot Summary

"That Was Then, This Is Now" is the second of five novels by S.E. Hinton. The main characters are Bryon Douglas and his best friend/adopted younger brother Mark. At the start of the novel, Bryon and Mark are doing their usual routine of hanging out and hustling at the local pool hall. Their lives are comprised of fun and fighting as they look for people to beat up while defending their friends from beatings. Neither one has thought twice about their actions before now. But, starting with their friend M&M's disapproval of their actions, the novel chronicles the beginning and evolution of Bryon's existential crisis.

Bryon and Mark's mother is in the hospital at the beginning of the book. At the hospital, Bryon has another interaction that spurs self-questioning: he meets a boy who was badly beaten yet doesn't blame his attackers. For Bryon, whose life has been one kneejerk reaction to violence after another, the idea of forgiveness confounds him. Mark, on the other hand, stays firmly entrenched in his belief of retribution and thinks the boy's stance is stupid.

At the hospital Bryon also meets Cathy, M&M's older sister who has just returned from private school. He is immediately attracted to her and appreciates that she isn't interested in gang life.

Before too long, violence erupts again. It happens while Bryon is on his first date with Cathy. His ex-girlfriend Angela asked a boy to beat up Ponyboy Curtis and when Mark tries to stop the fight, he gets hit. Mark is sent to the hospital and later confesses to Bryon that having him there in the hospital made him realize how Bryon really is Mark's only family.

As Mark recuperates, he tells Bryon he worries about the gang falling apart. Bryon agrees the gang isn't as close as it once was, but Bryon sees this as a sign of growing up more than growing apart. When Mark goes back to his old antics and is arrested for stealing the school principal's car, Bryon is livid that Mark gets off with a slap of the wrist, per usual for Mark.

Bryon's questioning of his (and Mark's) principles is put to the test when, in a tragic accident, Charlie is killed trying to protect the boys from men they hustled. Bryon is racked with guilt over his friend's death, struck by the unfairness of it all. Mark, on the other hand, evades guilty feelings by emphasizing Charlie's involvement in the matter more than theirs. The great divide between their perspectives pushes Bryon away from Mark and towards Cathy, as she understands Bryon's perspective. For the first time in his life, Mark is jealous of one of Bryon's girlfriends.

True to his form, however, Mark soon gets over his jealous feelings. He, Bryon, Cathy, and M&M go cruising. Tensions rise between Cathy and Mark as Cathy disapproves of Mark's behavior and Mark disapproves of being analyzed by Cathy. Bryon feels caught in the middle. Mark leaves the group, very frustrated. To Cathy and Bryon's surprise,

M&M leaves the car too to join his other friends. Cathy and Bryon try to stop him, but he won't return and goes missing for several weeks.

Some time later, Mark asks Bryon to go cruising with him, with the intention of finding Bryon's ex-girlfriend Angela and getting even with her for having him beat up. Bryon reluctantly goes along with the idea. They cut off Angela's hair after she passes out in their car and then leave her at her front yard. When they return home, Bryon still can't fathom Charlie's death or Mike's beating and desperately asks Mark why these things happen. Mark points out to Bryon that it's futile to ask "What if . . .".

The next day Mark takes Bryon to the house where he knows M&M has been staying. He doesn't say how he knows this, though. However, the day they arrive, M&M isn't home. Bryon wonders how the people at this drug house know who Mark is. Later that evening, Bryon goes to pick Mark up at a friend's house and while he's waiting, Angela's brothers drive past and spot Bryon. They beat him savagely in retaliation. When Bryon gains consciousness, Mark promises to avenge this beating, but Bryon begs Mark not to. He wants the endless cycle of fighting to stop. Like Mike, he also doesn't feel animosity towards his attackers. This, along with his plea for nonviolence, infuriates Mark who wants to resort to violence to alleviate guilty feelings. Later, Bryon takes Cathy to the drug house to find her brother. They find him, but unfortunately not in time to stop him from having a nasty acid trip and needing hospitalization. The doctor tells his friends and family that he may never fully recover from this incident.

Already overwhelmed by how complicated his life has become, Bryon is further vexed when he finds a stash of drugs under Mark's bed. He realizes that Mark has been getting all of his money from drug dealing. This is why he knows where M&M has been staying: he's been selling drugs to the people in that house. Having seen the pain caused by drugs in Cathy's family and tired of Mark always getting away with his antics, Bryon decides to call the cops on Mark.

Unfortunately, Bryon is soon overwhelmed with guilt after doing this. Not unlike Mark, Bryon decides to get even with someone to compensate for his guilty feelings. Unfortunately, that person is Cathy, whom he unfairly blames for Mark's imprisonment. In trying to serve justice on his own terms, Bryon has lost two of the closest people in his life and is left confused and wishing for simpler days.

# Chapter 1

## Summary

Bryon and Mark go to the local pool hall intending to hustle unsuspecting players, a regular activity for them. Charlie, the bar owner, lets Mark and Bryon hang out there even though they're underage, but warns them that one day they will get in trouble for scamming the wrong people. He also tells the two boys to pay them back the tab they owe him. After finding nobody to hustle and learning they have no more credit with Charlie, Mark and Bryon go looking for M&M. They all head to the bowling alley. M&M only goes along for the walk so as soon as he gets there he leaves. Mark and Bryon decide to catch up with him. Outside they see that the Shepard brothers, Curly and Tim, are following M&M, about to attack him. In M&M's defense, Mark and Bryon attack the Shepards. Mark also picks their pockets so he can pay back Charlie. When Mark and Bryon see a black man nearby, they talk about attacking him until M&M admonishes them for thinking of doing the same thing that the Shepard brothers were about to do to M&M. He takes off running for home.

## Analysis

Chapter 1 sets up what everyday life is for Mark and Bryon in the poor, violent area where they live. Even though they are only teenagers, they are used to fending mostly for themselves. They smoke, drink, steal, hustle, and fight, and the only parental figure in their life is Bryon's mother who isn't present much. Even though they are involved with many unsavory activities, they seem to be mostly good-natured, happy kids with perhaps too much free time on their hands.

The fight with the Shepard boys illustrates how easy it is for a teenage boy to fall into violence. Without looking to get into a fight, they get in one to defend M&M. If nothing else, these boys are unfailingly loyal to their friends and family. However, they seem unable to see the hypocrisy of their actions. They feel wronged when one of them is attacked, but they don't see the problem in attacking someone else. When M&M points out this hypocrisy to Mark and Bryon, only Bryon thinks about his statement. Mark blows it off completely. This is a significant difference between the two boys.

## Vocabulary

hustle, plainclothes cop, scouting, skin mag, moccasins, rawhide, absent-minded, carbon copies, hot-wire, probation, limerick, lady-killer, Sam Hill, stranglehold, switchblade, cussing, dissolve, social club, rumbles, mugged

# Chapter 2

## Summary

Mark and Bryon visit Bryon's mother in the hospital after having a costly operation they had to sell their belongings to afford. When they visit her, she tells them about a kid across the hall that hasn't had any visitors. Unconcerned about herself and with a soft spot for abandoned children, she suggests that Mark and Bryon cheer him up. Mark goes to visit the boy, but Bryon first stops at the hospital snack bar. M&M's sister, Cathy, who has just returned home from private school works at the snack bar and recognizes Bryon immediately. It takes him a while to recognize her. He is attracted to her and wants to talk with her longer, but she isn't allowed to fraternize with customers. He leaves to visit the boy across from his mom's room.

The boy is Mike Chambers. He tells Bryon the story of how he got hurt. He and his gang were hanging out in a drugstore when an attractive black girl walked in to buy cigarettes. The others started hassling her and as soon as one of the guys put a hand on the girl, Mike told them to stop. They let her go at his insistence and she left to catch a bus. Figuring that she had missed her bus and was at risk of more harm if she waited in that neighborhood for the next bus, Mike offered her a ride home. Afraid to trust him, but also aware of her present danger, she reluctantly accepted his offer. The entire ride home she was afraid he would hurt her, but he was a gentleman and tried to calm her down. When he dropped her off at her house and the neighborhood boys saw that she had been crying, they incorrectly assumed that Mike had done something wrong. When he saw he was about to be attacked, he asked the girl to defend his innocence. Instead she told the boys to "Kill the white bastard." Their attack sent him to the hospital.

He tells Bryon that he doesn't hold any resentment against the girl or black people in general. His father, however, thinks it was stupidity that got him into the hospital and refuses to allow his mother to visit him there.

## Analysis

Bryon meets two important people in this chapter: M&M's sister, Cathy, who will later become Bryon's girlfriend and Mike Chambers, whose story serves as both a mirror and a morality lesson to Bryon.

As soon as they start talking, Bryon can tell that he and Mike have similar socioeconomic backgrounds. From Mike's story, Bryon also learns that they both run in gangs. Because violence is such a common activity for both of their gangs, it is only a matter of time before Bryon gets as hurt as Mike does. But what really moves Bryon is Mike's take on the matter: He harbors no resentment for the specific girl or her racial group after his attack even though his friends, who haven't been attacked, do. When Mark later tells Bryon that he would forever hate anyone who attacked him, Bryon is

even more affected. On one hand, he understands Mike's point of view, which reveals Bryon's empathetic tendencies. But Mark's feelings represent the point of view commonly held in Bryon's circle. He is so affected by these dichotomous statements because he doesn't know which one he should believe.

## **Vocabulary**

scrounged, hippies, wisecrack, lame, lanky, racking, groovy, lady-killer, self-image, husky, Sir Galahad, assault

# Chapter 3

## Summary

Bryon begins looking for a job, but can't find one. He'd like to work for Charlie, but Charlie tells Bryon that while he trusts his actions, he doesn't trust his words. But he does let Bryon borrow his car for his first date with Cathy.

Bryon goes to pick up Cathy and meets her parents. Her father is clearly unhappy about M&M's hippie tendencies and his poor school grades. Cathy later expresses her frustrations with her father's bullying of M&M.

They arrive at the dance and everyone looks at Cathy, which makes Bryon proud. He and Cathy have a nice time dancing and Bryon discovers that Cathy is a lot nicer than other girls he's been with. She is polite and doesn't try to make Bryon jealous.

Later on, Ponyboy Curtis finds Bryon to tell him that Mark's been hurt in a fight. Mark and Ponyboy had been hanging outside when a boy took a swing at Ponyboy. Mark tried to stop the boy but ended up taking a hit. Bryon discovers that his ex-girlfriend Angela had sent this boy to beat up Ponyboy for not wanting to date her. Bryon goes to the hospital with Mark where he gets ten stitches in the head, leaving Charlie's car and Cathy behind at the party. Just as he and Mark are about to leave and figure out a way to get home, Cathy and Ponyboy show up in Charlie's car to take them both home. Mark confesses to Bryon later on that having him at the hospital made him feel much better because Bryon is the only family he has.

## Analysis

In Chapter 3, Bryon makes important discoveries about himself, Cathy, and Mark. He considers what Charlie says about being able to trust Bryon's actions, but not his words. Of course, it's Bryon's fabrications that make him such a good hustler, but this is the first time Bryon has ever thought about the negative implications (for him) of his less-than-honest words.

Bryon also discovers that Cathy doesn't push the same buttons as the other girls he's dated and that's likely because she doesn't lower herself to the games and nastiness that the other girls in his circle do. As her putting herself through private school shows, she's interested in bettering herself, not in childish behavior. Bryon likes this, which indicates a waning interest in gang life.

Mark, on the other hand, is steeped in gang life. Because of how important Bryon is to Mark – as he admits in Chapter 3 – Bryon will undoubtedly feel a pull to stay loyal to Mark and his lifestyle choices, even if that conflicts with his growing desire to evolve.



## Vocabulary

cussing, bawl, boozing, sassy, smirk, ringlets, contorted, flounced, staggering, pry, unconscious, shirttail, gash, radioed, nick, fracture, groggy, hacked, hot-wired, lulu, illegitimate, blabbering

# Chapter 4

## Summary

As Mark recuperates in bed, he and Bryon reminisce about old times getting into trouble or breaking the law. Mark laments that their gang isn't as tight as it used to be and that the feeling of brotherhood is slipping away. Bryon counters that it's nice to not have to rely upon a gang to have a self-identity. When Mark asks him why he thinks things have been changing, Bryon simply answers, "That was then, and this is now."

This conversation affects Bryon through to the next day and he wanders around school feeling an outsider more than a participant. He notices that the warring gangs, the Greasers and Socs, now resemble each other as their clothing styles have changed. He also begins to suspect that his Socs friends were only his friends so they could show off to each other how liberal and accepting of the working class they were.

One day Bryon doesn't see Mark at school, but doesn't worry about it because Mark often cuts school. But he learns that Mark has been arrested again, this time for stealing the school principal's car to meet with the probation officer he was assigned after being caught stealing cars. Because Mark can easily get out of sticky situations, he manages to avoid punishment from the principal and the probation officer, who instead offers to pick him up and drop him off for his weekly appointment. Bryon is angry with Mark for getting into trouble, but relents since no permanent harm came of his trouble.

## Analysis

In this chapter, Bryon makes the most significant realization: times are changing. Whatever he might have liked to do a year or two ago, his feelings about it have changed. Specifically, he doesn't need the gang lifestyle as much as he once did or as Mark continues to need it. He doesn't need a group of people to tell him who he is or that he matters. Because of that, certain elements of the gang life now seem foreign to him as evidenced by the different light in which he sees the Socs and Greasers.

Bryon is also becoming frustrated with Mark's ability to escape the consequences of his behaviors. Perhaps he fears Mark will never mature or change or perhaps he is just jealous. Whatever the reason for Bryon's frustrations, this is another difference between Bryon and Mark that will create a rift between them.

## Vocabulary

racked, bare fisted, drenched, hub, reminiscing, yelped, rueful, ritzy, shirttails, liberals, probation, aforementioned, glinted

# Chapter 5

## Summary

Bryon thinks about Cathy and how she is so different from Angela, the only other girl he's really cared about. They're both "gutsy," but in different ways. When Cathy tells Bryon that Ponyboy asked her out, Bryon gets jealous and asks Cathy out to make sure she can't go out with Ponyboy. Presumably to afford his upcoming date with Cathy, Bryon and Mark go hustling at Charlie's.

Mark and Bryon hustle two Texans whom they play until the bar closes. As Mark and Bryon leave Charlie's, the two Texans, who left earlier, surprise the two boys outside the bar. One holds a gun and the other gets out his brass knuckles. Bryon tells them to let Mark go, but they refuse. Just as they're about to attack the two boys, Charlie comes into the alley and points a shotgun at the Texans. Bryon and Mark think they've escaped when the Texan surprisingly takes a shot at Charlie and the boys. Charlie shields the boys with his body and Mark grabs the shotgun to fire back. The Texans escape unharmed, but the boys discover that Charlie has been shot dead.

After the murder, Bryon feels out of sorts, as if the rest of the world is speeding by him and he's stuck in slow motion. Mark tries to help by telling Bryon that Charlie knew the risks of confronting the Texans with a shotgun. Bryon reminds Mark that Charlie had tried to warn them about hustling beforehand and that, because of them, Charlie's dreams are over. Mark counters with "things happen."

Bryon and Cathy start spending more time together and sharing their feelings with each other. Eventually Bryon feels closer to Cathy than he does to Mark and subsequently, Mark grows jealous.

## Analysis

Bryon has fully summed up the feelings he's been having recently: he is changing and Mark is not. Nowhere is this more striking than in the two boys' different interpretations of Charlie's death. Bryon clearly sees his culpability in the event, but Mark sees Charlie's death more as an arbitrary event for which Charlie, more than anyone else, bore responsibility. It was his bar that attracted some unsavory types and it was his decision to confront the Texans with his own shotgun. This perspective allows Mark to get over the tragedy relatively easy while Bryon is left feeling guilty, conflicted, and saddened.

The empty space that Bryon's dissolving friendship with Mark has left is being filled with his relationship with Cathy who, not coincidentally, is a lot more thoughtful and intellectual than Mark. She is a mature young lady who has plans to go to college. She is not interested in petty squabbles and illegal behavior. Bryon's switch from Mark to



Cathy for a confidante reflects his own internal switch from a juvenile delinquent to a caring young adult.

## Vocabulary

river-bed, obligingly, unsuspecting, rawhide, absent-mindedly, weather-beaten, sauntered, brass knuckles, contorting, sickly

# Chapter 6

## Summary

Mark and Bryon reconcile after Mark accepts that his and Bryon's relationship is changing. Meanwhile, remembering Charlie's words, Bryon changes his look and attitude to get a job. Mark promises he will soon start bringing in money too.

Later, Bryon talks to Cathy about her fear that M&M is smoking marijuana. Cathy is shocked to discover that Bryon isn't as concerned as she is and, moreover, has smoked marijuana too. She asks him to stop because he is good enough not to resort to illicit activities. Bryon realizes he loves Cathy.

The two pick up M&M and Mark and drive down the Ribbon, a two-mile stretch of road popular for cruising. When they're stopped at an intersection, a car pulls up next to theirs and one of its occupants yells something nasty to them. Mark gets out of the car and punches the boy. Bryon is impressed with Mark's quick response, but Cathy is not. When she tries to understand his violent behavior, he tells her he doesn't want to be analyzed. He gets out of the car and joins up with his other friend, leaving Cathy, Bryon, and M&M figuring out what to do next.

As the three drive away, M&M, who's kept to himself, sees some other friends of his and decides to leave the car too. Surprisingly, he tells Cathy he's never coming back home and walks away. Cathy and Bryon try to get him back in the car, but he disappears and they unsuccessfully search for him for the rest of the night.

## Analysis

It finally comes to a head in Chapter 6 that Cathy and Mark don't care for each other and never will. They simply can't see eye to eye. When Bryon talks of getting beat up by the police when he was 13, Cathy sides with the police, telling Bryon he and Mark should never have been drunk and out late at night. As someone trying to mature and see both sides to a story, Bryon considers Cathy's argument. Mark, however, completely dismisses it and expresses his dislike of analysis, which is antithetical to Bryon's burgeoning introspection and self-growth. Someone who avoids analysis will have a difficult time evolving. However, evolving doesn't interest Mark anyway. He prefers to see people as immutable objects incapable of change and so we should just take or leave them. Not surprisingly, this attitude is a handy excuse for Mark's illegal or immoral behaviors.

Meanwhile, M&M, who is already a quiet person, has become withdrawn, perhaps because he feels like an outsider in his own family. He, like Bryon, is changing too, trying to find where and with whom he belongs. His running away to his other hippie friends might confirm Cathy's suspicion that he's involved in drugs and it certainly is a critical moment for M&M's life.

## Vocabulary

testify, impersonally, vengeful, smart-aleck, nitwit, incredulous, artificial, stimulants, vaguely, crudity, proposition, accelerator, mock, hostility, teeny-boppers, recollection, car-hop, twiddle, squealing

# Chapter 7

## Summary

Bryon helps Cathy explain to her parents what happened. Cathy and Bryon fear the worst while Cathy's father and Mark think there's nothing to worry about. This leads into another disagreement between Mark and Bryon about how carefree youth really is.

A few weeks after M&M's disappearance, Mark and Bryon hang out like old times, cruising along the Ribbon. They stop to talk with Angela and tease her about her new life as a married woman. With a secretive plan, Mark suggests to Angela that they buy some rum and hang out. Not one to turn down free alcohol, Angela agrees. Already drunk, Angela breaks down and admits to Bryon that her life is a disappointment. After she passes out, Mark takes the opportunity to cut off her long hair. At first Bryon objects, especially after Angela's sad confession, but Mark reminds Bryon that Angela sent Mark to the hospital. Afterwards, they leave Angela and her hair on her front yard.

At home, Bryon, still drunk, starts crying and asks Mark why people like Mike and Charlie get hurt for caring about someone. He also asks Mark why his parents shot each other. That's when Mark tells him to stop thinking about why things happen and all of the what-ifs. He argues that when people start doing that, they stop being able to get away with things and start growing old. Bryon finally falls asleep.

## Analysis

A little more light is shed on why Mark is the way he is and how Bryon is still battling with a guilty conscience. The attacks on Mike and Charlie have really confused Bryon. He can't reconcile how good people like Mike and Charlie get hurt when trying to do good things. The unfairness of it all racks Bryon's brain. Mark, who has seemed oblivious to feelings of guilt and responsibility, explains that he purposely doesn't let himself feel that way because he doesn't see the good in it. He recognizes that his own life would have turned out very different even if just little things had been different. What he understands that Bryon can't is that so much of what happens in our lives is beyond our control. We are not as in control of our lives as we'd like to think we are. He learned that when his parents shot each other, and it was then that he decided he would never let someone hurt him again. So even if bad things happen to him, he's not going to let himself feel bad about it anymore, including feeling bad about his own actions.

## Vocabulary

housecoat, sensible, spur, sarcastically, half-hearted, superiorly, obscenities, bawl, rummy, nitwit, weaving

# Chapter 8

## Summary

The next day, Bryon goes to work hung over. After work, Mark surprises him by picking him up in Charlie's old car – now Bryon's – and takes him to the house where M&M has been staying. The people inside recognize Mark and call him "Cat." He asks if M&M – or "Baby Freak" as he's known there – is there, but they tell him he hasn't been around and is "going to crash." Mark and Bryon drive home.

Later that evening, after he drops Cathy off from their date, Bryon drives to his friend Terry's house to pick up Mark. No one is home, so he waits on the porch thinking that they've just gone out for alcohol. As he waits, Angela's brothers, Tim and Curly, see him there and stop. They confront him about what happened to Angela and, for the first time, he decides to tell the truth. They beat him unconscious and he wakes up to Mark looking after him. Mark assures him he and their friends will get back at the Shepards, but he makes Mark promise him he won't. He's tired of the endless fighting back and forth and wants it to stop. Mark sticks to his promise and looks after Bryon all night.

## Analysis

Bryon learns a little more about Mark's secret activities. He doesn't understand how it all connects, but now he knows that Mark is somehow involved with the hippie drug community. Because Mark knows that Bryon judges marijuana smokers differently than drinkers, the distance between the two boys grows.

In this chapter, Bryon also makes an active stand against the status quo. Instead of evading responsibility about his actions, he freely admits that he participated in cutting off Angela's hair. He doesn't want to play games anymore, recognizing the time-wasters that they are. He also tries to stop the cycle of violence by telling Mark to not seek revenge. Even though it would be understandable if Bryon wanted justice for his injuries, he knows the cycle has to stop somewhere and that he's the likeliest person to stop it.

## Vocabulary

commandment, gulf, flats, fringed, grass, hang ups, hood, witticism



# Chapter 9

## Summary

Bryon, like Mark, had to go to the hospital after his beating. Bryon explains to Mark that, just like Mike, he didn't hate the people who beat him. This infuriates Mark who wants to relieve his guilt over the assault by exacting revenge on the Shepards. He admits that, for the first time in his life, he was really worried when he discovered Bryon's unconscious body. Cathy later comes to visit Bryon and she, like Mark, cries over Bryon's condition. Bryon takes that opportunity to finally tell Cathy he loves her.

When Bryon recovers he visits Charlie's grave to pay his respects and thank him for saving his life. He also follows through on his commitment to take Cathy to the drug house to find M&M. They learn from one of the dwellers that M&M took acid that day and reacted badly. All day long people have been trying to stop him from jumping out the window. When they finally see M&M, he is a dirtier, thinner, more frightened version of himself. He tells them of the bad acid trip he had, still clearly shaken by it. They decide to take M&M to the hospital and meet M&M's dad there.

## Analysis

Bryon's assault gives Mark something to worry about and make him wonder what if Bryon had been killed. Experiencing guilt disturbs Mark and what's worse is that Bryon won't let him relieve that guilt by beating up the Shepard boys. This gives the reader some insight into perhaps why Mark feels entitled to steal or beat up other people: he needs to do it to even the score for all of the times he's been cheated or hurt. Thus, his carefree attitude may really just be a mask to protect him against feelings of injustice.

Meanwhile, Bryon, now fully committed to bettering himself, takes honest, responsible action by first admitting his true feelings to Cathy and helping her rescue her brother, then finally expressing his gratitude to Charlie.

## Vocabulary

quivering, commune, barren, glorify, horsed around, acquired, huddled

# Chapter 10-11

## Summary

### Chapter 10

M&M's doctor pronounces that he may never fully recover mentally. Cathy is in hysterics.

When Bryon goes home, he thinks about how his life is not as simple as it once was. Back in his room, he searches for a pack of cigarettes under Mark's bed, but finds a large stash of drugs instead. He realizes that Mark is a drug dealer. That's how he's been getting his money and how he knew where M&M was. He'd been selling drugs to the people at that house. The pain that drugs caused M&M and Cathy convinces Bryon to call the cops on Mark.

While Bryon waits for the cops to show up, Mark comes home. Bryon confronts Mark about the drugs and is frustrated that Mark doesn't see anything wrong with selling drugs. Mark defends his decision by saying that if kids are going to buy them anyway, he should be able to make money off of it. He also tries to reassure Bryon that he wasn't the one who sold M&M the acid. This does little to comfort Bryon. Mark does offer to stop selling, but Bryon has had enough and tells Mark that the police are on the way. Mark is in disbelief until the police show up, at which point he simply asks Bryon how he could have done this to him.

### Chapter 11

The next day Bryon is racked with confusion, not sure if he did the right thing. Cathy visits him, worried because Bryon hasn't contacted her since Mark went to jail. He is rude to her and accuses her of being glad that Mark is in prison. When Cathy asks him why he's being so mean, he realizes that he no longer cares for her.

Mark has his trial and is sentenced to five years in the state reformatory.

Bryon continues to work at the grocery store and even gets a promotion. He feels like he's become a different person, a mixture of all of the people he's come into contact with in the last year.

He finally gets to visit Mark who is at risk of being sent to the state prison. Mark still fully hates Bryon and tells him he'll never see him again. Bryon decides not to visit Mark again and Mark is sent to state prison as feared. While Bryon has become a better student and employee, he feels mixed up inside. He's stopped caring about anyone else and he is mired in self-questioning. He wishes more than anything that he could return to his younger days when he had all the answers.

## Analysis

When Bryon learns that Mark has been dealing drugs, he has just witnessed the damage drugs can do to users and their loved ones. So with that knowledge still weighing heavy on his heart, Bryon wants to make Mark pay for the damage, whether or not he directly caused it. Before, Mark's antics didn't especially hurt anybody; at least, no one close to Bryon. This incident is different. Not only is Mark involved with threatening people's safety, but also he is affecting the circle of people with which M&M travels. Bryon cannot let Mark escape responsibility this time. To ensure that Mark pays for this incident – and possibly previous times he escaped punishment – Bryon directly affects the deliverance of justice when he calls the police. The recent events have been so painful to him that he needs to see someone pay for them.

Unfortunately, Bryon feels an entirely different pain – guilt – after sending his brother to jail. He doesn't understand why he does it, but he pushes Cathy away and out of his life forever even though he loved her. It takes his mother's insight for him to realize that he was punishing Mark for Cathy, but then Cathy for Mark. His desperate need to set things right, to even the score and make the responsible parties pay, forced him to push two of the most important people out of his life, thereby punishing himself doubly. He is left confused, second-guessing all of his recent actions, tunneling through a mountain of "What if" questions. Somewhere along the path of maturing, Bryon got thrown off-course and instead of becoming a "grown up," he deteriorated into a confused, unhappy young man, romantically wishing for the days of youthful confidence.

## Vocabulary

hem, LSD, sermons, halfheartedly, cylinder, pusher, clobbered, pleading, vaguely, wearily, juvenile, formalities, reformatory, chromosomes, last-ditch, sinister

# Characters

## Bryon Douglas

Bryon Douglas is the 16 year-old narrator of the novel. Up until the beginning of the novel, he has been enjoying a carefree life of hustling, fighting, and hanging out with his best friend Mark. But during the course of the novel, his beliefs about right and wrong are challenged and he begins rethinking his ways. By the end of the novel, he is so distraught by the injustice and pain around him that he pushes away two of the closest people in his life.

## Mark

Mark is the adopted brother of Bryon Douglas. After his parents shot each other in a drunken fight, Bryon's mother took Mark in at age 9 and has raised him as one of her own ever since then. Mark has an uncanny ability to escape the consequences of his actions, such as breaking the law. This is why he never feels guilty when bad things happen. When Bryon discovers he has been selling drugs, he decides to turn him in to the cops and make him pay for at least one of his actions.

## Charlie

Charlie is the owner of the local pool hall and bar. He's 22. He is a mentor of sorts to Bryon and Mark because he made something out of himself despite having no advantages. Despite warning the boys not to hustle, they continue and are nearly killed by two men they hustled. Charlie comes to their rescue, and in the fight, Charlie is killed and Mark and Bryon live.

## M&M Carlson

M&M is the quiet, hippie, younger brother of Cathy Carlson. He's very serious and sensitive. He has no interest in violence or any other gang activity. When he gets caught up in drugs, he decides to run away from his house where his father bullies him for having long hair and poor grades. He stays at a drug house where he has a very bad reaction to illegal drugs and is sent to the hospital. He is reunited with his family, but he is never the same mentally.

## Curly and Tim Shepard

Curly especially didn't like Bryon because Bryon dated Curly's sister and they didn't end on good terms. These two brothers are always fighting with Mark and Bryon. When

Curly and Tim beat up Bryon and send him to the hospital, Bryon is done with retaliating.

## **Ponyboy Curtis**

The narrator of Hinton's book, *The Outsiders*, Ponyboy Curtis makes an appearance here as Mark's friend and Angela's former love interest. Bryon at first believes Ponyboy is stuck up because he's so quiet, but he's really just shy and really nice. Bryon learns this later.

## **Cathy Carlson**

Cathy is M&M's older sister whom Bryon meets after she returns home from private school. Bryon starts dating her because she is attractive and very nice, unlike his first girlfriend Angela. She is not interested in gangs or fighting. Her dislike of Mark puts Bryon in a difficult position and at the end of the novel, Bryon breaks up with Cathy after unfairly blaming her for the dissolution of his relationship with Mark.

# Objects/Places

## Drugs

Drugs are a big lure to the kids in Bryon's town. There's not much to do for fun in that area and there's also money to be made off of selling them. Unfortunately for Bryon, he sees firsthand the pain caused by drugs when one of his friends suffers a mental breakdown from taking them. When he later finds out that Mark has been selling drugs, Bryon feels an overwhelming urge to make Mark pay for this suffering, even though he never sold drugs to their friend.

## Cars

Cars are an integral parts of the lives of the teenagers in Bryon's town. A lot of them like to cruise down a strip of road called the Ribbon. As Bryon starts dating Cathy, he needs to have a car in which to drive them. He also likes to cruise and uses a car to drive to work. Charlie lets him borrow his car since Bryon doesn't have his own and after Charlie's death, the cops let Bryon keep the car.

## Cigarettes

Even though they're minors, Mark and Bryon like to smoke cigarettes. In looking for their emergency pack of cigarettes one day under Mark's bed, Bryon finds a hidden stash of drugs.

## Alcohol

The teens in the novel like to drink. It is with alcohol that Mark and Bryon trick Angela into hanging out with them so they cut off her hair once she's passed out.

## The Ribbon

The Ribbon is a two-mile stretch of road that the town's teenagers like to cruise down. It is while cruising down the Ribbon that Cathy and Mark become so frustrated with each other that Mark leaves the car. It is also when M&M leaves the gang for what turns out to be a several weeks-long stay at a drug house.

## Hospital

Nearly all major characters in the novel have to go to the hospital: Bryon's mom, Mark, Bryon, M&M, and their acquaintance, Mike. Cathy also works in the hospital's café. It is

where Bryon first takes an interest in Cathy; where he learns that M&M may never fully recover; where he meets Mike, who harbors no ill-will on his attackers; and where the doctor pointedly asks him if there's nothing else to do but beat each other up in their town.

## **Charlie's**

Mark and Bryon like to spend a lot of their time at Charlie's pool hall and bar. They like Charlie and they also like hustling his customers. It is after one particularly successful hustle at the pool hall that the men who were hustled try to attack Mark and Bryon. Charlie comes out to rescue them, but is shot dead right outside his own pool hall.

# Themes

## Violence

Violence is a major and dominant theme in Hinton's novel, "That Was Then, This is Now". Violence is so common in Bryon's life because it serves a variety of purposes, and is very useful to him. It serves as diversion for bored or drunken teenagers and as a means of delivering justice. Many of the teens in this novel let their fists do the talking for them, so there is rarely a conflict solved without physical fighting or some form of physical contact. Violence is also a means of preserving honor, of gaining, earning, and keeping respect from others. In a social situation where money is short and tempers are high, violence is the most effective means to attain some sort of status or reputation.

Unfortunately, as Bryon realizes, violence only creates more violence. If a person uses violence to tell another person to leave him or her alone, it ironically results in exactly the opposite of what he or she wants. Bryon gets sick of this endless cycle and tries to stop it.

## Injustice

Bryon is in turmoil over recent events, largely because he doesn't feel justice is being served—including when it comes to Mark and his selling of drugs. Additionally, even though Bryon is moved by Mike's sympathy for his attackers, he wants to know why someone trying to do something good, such as Mike, gets punished for it. He asks the same question about Charlie, who was trying to save Mark and Bryon's lives when he was killed. For that event, Bryon also feels a sense of culpability, but Mark tries to convince him that neither of them is to blame. Bryon is not necessarily looking to blame anyone: he is sick of the cycle of injustice that perforates his world, and needs to take action. He wants someone to be responsible for all of the injustices occurring in his life and, largely, to people he cares about.

It is this overwhelming sense of injustice that makes Bryon turn his best friend into the authorities. Bryon may have made Mark pay for wrongs he did not commit, but Mark's ability to always evade responsibility convinced Bryon that he needed to be punished. Unfortunately for Bryon, he became so involved in and confused by serving out justice, that he ended up punishing himself most of all in the end.

## Coming of Age

Even the title of the novel speaks to this theme, for it comes from Bryon trying to explain to Mark why things seem different than they used to be, specifically the dissolution of their gang. Many things that were one way when Bryon and Mark were younger have changed. Bryon needs the gang less than he used to for his sense of identity. He also starts dating a girl unlike one he's ever dated. Instead of being immature, jealous, and



vengeful like the others, Cathy is mature, kind, and interested in learning. The eventual demise of his friendship with Mark is the ultimate indication that things are different than they used to be. But, as Bryon acknowledges, growing up comes with the sacrifice of innocence and simplicity, a process that he's not entirely successful with. At the end of the book, he is a lost boy wishing he could go back to the way things were. But no one can stay young forever, as the real world –the adult world –comes crashing down on childhood.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is narrated in the first-person by Bryon. Bryon is a transparent narrator, allowing the reader to make his or her own judgments about the people in Bryon's life as if the reader were right there with him. If the other characters were able to see how Bryon was representing the events in the story, they'd probably agree with his interpretations. Bryon is also very forthright about his feelings and impressions of other people, hiding nothing from the reader. As a result, the reader knows Bryon's psyche intimately and can almost predict his next actions.

## Setting

The novel is set in a small, working class town, likely in the late 1960s. It likely has the same setting as Hinton's other popular novel, *The Outsiders*. The town Bryon lives in has a large influence on him and his loved ones, whether or not he's fully aware of it. An education isn't a priority nor are other opportunities for self-betterment. The people in this town live day-to-day, looking for work if they can find it and making enough money to pay their bills. This is partly why it's not unusual for parents to be only minimally involved in their kids' lives, such as Bryon's mom is. She's too busy procuring the basic necessities – food and shelter – to pay much mind to what Bryon and Mark do in their free time or even during school time. The socioeconomic make-up of Bryon's hometown makes a perfect environment for gangs to develop.

## Language and Meaning

The novel is written in a language very true to how someone of Bryon's age and background would speak. His vernacular is very true to someone without much education yet. Bryon's narration is direct, clear, without subtlety or innuendo. There is little use of literary devices like symbolism, metaphor, or allusion. Hinton, instead, favors a gritty, simple language that immediately suggests the "other side of the tracks" life that her narrator has.

## Structure

The novel is divided into eleven chapters. Each chapter is about ten pages long. The story starts right before several life-changing events occur in Bryon's life that make him question everything that's important to him. It ends after he has tried to right some wrongs and ends up losing almost everyone near and dear to him in the process.

Most of the story's events happen to people other than Bryon, the narrator: Charlie gets shot; M&M suffers a mental breakdown; and Mark sells drugs. The main plot is Bryon's internal struggle with the unfairness of these events happening around him.

# Quotes

'Speak for yourself, man,' Charlie said. 'This part of town don't make nobody a hood. (Chapter 1)

Mark was my best buddy and I loved him like a brother. (Chapter 1)

Mark couldn't see anything wrong with stealing stuff. I could. (Chapter 2)

So that was how we lived, stealing stuff and selling stuff, trying to save money and eat at the same time. (Chapter 2)

You know what the crummiest feeling you can have is? To hate the person you love best in the world. (Chapter 3)

I used to be able to get all uptight about a fight, look forward to it. Nowadays it was getting a little boring. (Chapter 4)

He would stare at me for long periods of time when he thought I wasn't watching, like he was trying to find the old Bryon in this stranger, like he was trying to figure out who I was. (Chapter 5)

That was strange too: in the past I thought in terms of "we," now I was thinking in terms of "me. (Chapter 6)

You gotta just take things as they come, and quit trying to reason them out. (Chapter 7)

I don't want to keep this up, this getting-even jazz. It's stupid and I'm sick of it and it keeps going in circles. (Chapter 8)

We just couldn't get through to each other. He didn't understand why I didn't dig fights any more; I didn't understand how he could accept everything that came along without question, without wanting to change it. (Chapter 9)

Bryon, you got even with Mark for Cathy, then you got even with Cathy for Mark. When are you going to stop getting even with yourself? (Chapter 11)

# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

Do you agree with Bryon's decision to turn Mark into the authorities? Name a few reasons why Bryon might have done it. Would there have been a better way to reach out to Mark? If so, how? Do you agree with Bryon's mother's assessment of his actions: "Bryon, you got even with Mark for Cathy, then you got even with Cathy for Mark."?

## Topic 2

Bryon mentions several times that his mother doesn't interfere much with his and Mark's lives. Bryon likes this, but what do you make of her lack of presence in the novel? Do you think she bears any responsibility for what happened to Mark? Do you think she did the best that she could as a single mother?

## Topic 3

What do you think the future has in store for Bryon? What do you think will become of M&M? Of Cathy? Of Angela? Who has the best chances for success? Whose future are you most worried about? What do you think will happen to Mark after he finishes his time at the state penitentiary?

## Topic 4

Describe the town this story takes place in. If you had to guess, what kind of people make up the town? What kind of jobs might they hold? Are they college-educated? Do you think the town has a college? What do you think most residents do once they graduate from high school? Does everyone graduate from high school?

## Topic 5

Describe the appeal of being in a gang for boys like Bryon and Mark. What do they get out of it? Why are gangs like the Socs and Greasers so prevalent in this town? What type of personality would you have to have to be in a gang? Would it be difficult for someone to leave a gang if they wanted to? Why or why not?

## Topic 6

What does Charlie mean by “this part of town don’t make nobody a hood.”? Why does he say that? What do you think would make someone a “hood”? Does Bryon admire Charlie? Is Charlie unique to most people in their town? Why?