

**SUSAN
ELOISE
(S. E.) HINTON
(1948-)**



**CREATED
YOUNG-ADULT
FICTION
GENRE**

The story of S.E. Hinton begins with her most famous book, *The Outsiders*, which transformed young-adult fiction from a genre mostly about prom queens, football players and high school crushes to one that portrayed a darker adolescent world. Since it was published in 1967, the novel has sold 14 million copies, 500,000 of them last year alone.

Susan Eloise Hinton was born in July 1948 in Tulsa. The tomboyish Hinton was happiest at her grandmother's farm where her aunt had a horse. Her first stories were mostly about cowboys and gun fighting and horses. When she was a junior at Will Rogers High School, her father was diagnosed with cancer. To help her deal with his condition, Hinton began writing *The Outsiders* when she was fifteen.

The tense divide between the upper-class "Socials" and the lower-class "Greasers" at her high school was so bitter the gangs had to enter through separate doors. Although Hinton was in neither gang, the book is written from the point of view of the greaser Ponyboy in an effort to humanize the gang. However, Hinton also refrains from vilifying the Socs, believing that things are "rough all over". Ironically, Hinton got a "D" in creative writing that year.

Hinton didn't even think of publishing the book until the mother of one of her friends read the manuscript and contacted an agent based in New York. Soon Viking Press signed Hinton for a \$1,000 advance, with a suggestion that she call herself S. E. in print, so male critics wouldn't be turned off by a woman writer.

The Outsiders was published in 1967. Hinton's first royalty check was \$10 and, at one point, it was in danger of going out of print as a drugstore paperback. When teachers started using it in their classes, the publisher realized that there was a separate market for young adults. The novel is now recognized as a classic of young-adult literature and Hinton is credited with introducing the genre. It is required reading in many middle school classes.

Francis Ford Coppola's 1983 big-screen adaptation helped spark the "Brat Pack" genre of the 1980s and jumpstarted the careers of Rob Lowe, Tom Cruise, Emilio Estevez, Matt Dillon, Patrick Swayze, and Diane Lane. The director found the project after California high school students sent him a petition nominating him as the perfect director to adapt their favorite novel. Hinton's other novels *Rumble Fish* and *Tex* are also popular classroom novels and were also adapted for the screen by Coppola starring some of the same actors.

In 1988, Hinton received the inaugural Margaret Edwards Award from the American Library Association (ALA) for her cumulative contribution in writing for teens. In 1998 she was inducted into the Oklahoma Writers Hall of Fame.

As a child, Hinton dreamed of writing a book that told the truth about how kids think. A half-century later, a lot of young people still think she succeeded. *The Outsiders* is ranked #38 on the ALA's Top 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books and has been banned in some schools. But her novels changed the way people look at young adult literature.