



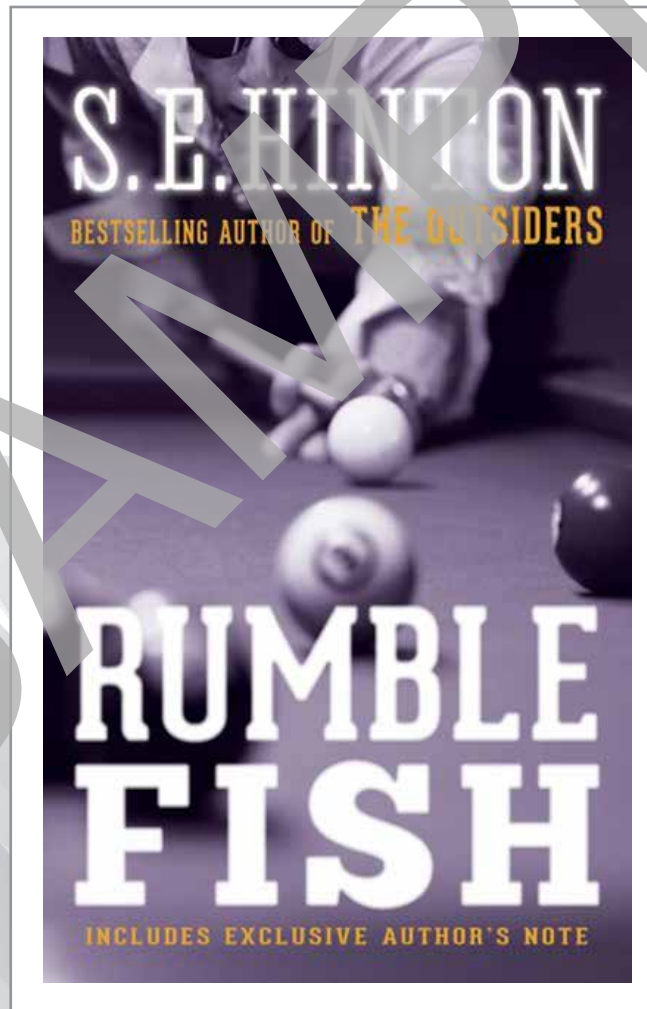
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Rumble Fish

S. E. Hinton



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Rumble Fish

S. E. Hinton

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Background on the Novelist

Susan Eloise Hinton was born in 1950 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She began writing at the age of 16, and her first novel, *The Outsiders*, was published when she was just 17. It was an overnight success. Hinton says she wrote this first novel “so I’d have something to read.” She felt the literature available to teenagers was either too grown-up or too unrealistic.

In a review of *The Outsiders*, critic Patty Campbell said that *The Outsiders* “gave birth to the new realism in adolescent literature” and elevated its author to “almost mythical status as the grand dame of young adult novelists” (*New York Times Book Review*, August 27, 1967).

Hinton says the major influence on her writing has been her reading. She has always written about things that interest her, and begins her books with characters rather than plots. Her characters are composites of people she knows (including, sometimes, herself) and become so real to her that she almost believes they exist. Hinton, as a teenager, was irritated by the social structures of high schools, by phony materialistic values, and by girls whose status depended on their boyfriends’. She feels young adult literature should reflect the real world teenagers live in.

While Hinton has been criticized for unlikely plotting, mediocre writing style, and the inclusion of violence, profanity, sex, drugs, and alcohol in her novels, many critics, librarians, and teachers have recognized Hinton’s value for young adult readers. Movie-makers have also found Hinton’s stories worthy of adaptation—*Tex* in 1982, *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish* in 1983, and *That Was Then, This Is Now* in 1985. Her only novel not yet made into a movie is *Taming the Star Runner*, published in 1988.

Hinton is married, has a son, and lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Students may write to her c/o Press Relations, Dell Publishing Company, 666 Fifth Avenue, 10th Floor, New York, New York, 10103.

## Plot Summary

The novel opens in the here and now, with the narrator, Rusty-James, running into an old friend, Steve, on the beach. The friend is going to college, but Rusty-James seems to be merely existing now that he is out of the reformatory. The meeting with Steve prompts Rusty-James’ memories of the days when the two were friends, and he begins to relate that story in the next chapter.

Rusty-James, at fourteen, hangs out at Benny’s, a pool hall, and prides himself on being a tough street-fighter, so he isn’t particularly afraid when he hears that Biff Wilcox wants to kill him. He and Steve are best friends, although the two are very different. They’ve worked out an arrangement whereby Rusty-James protects Steve from being beaten up and Steve supplies Rusty-James with homework answers.

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## Chapter-by-Chapter

### Chapters 1 and 2

#### Vocabulary

profession 2	barkeep 2	reformatory 2	solitary 3
glanced 3	chicks 4	complicated 4	flipped out 4
clenched 5	hacked off 6	cue 7	cat 7
vacant 8	cautious 8	audience 9	rep 9
rumblin(g) 10	allies 10	pestered 11	sincere 13

#### Vocabulary Activity

Have the students identify words from the list which are used as slang (chicks, flipped out, hacked off, cat, rep, rumbling). Many of the words will be identifiable from context or from prior knowledge. Have students write synonyms for the words they can define without dictionaries. For remaining words, have them look up definitions.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Where does the story begin? (*on a beach somewhere*)
2. What contrasts do you notice between Steve Hayes and the narrator? (*Steve is going to college, plans to be a teacher, and has always done a lot of reading. The narrator, Rusty-James, was in a reformatory for five years, has no apparent job or future plans, and has some knife-fight scars.*)
3. When did Steve and Rusty know one another? (*about five years ago, when they were 13 or 14*) How old does that make them now? (*18 or 19*)
4. What seems to be the narrator's mood? (*gloomy and unhappy*) Steve's mood? (*happy, positive, glad to see Rusty-James*)
5. How do you picture Rusty-James? How do you picture Steve?
6. What is Benny's? (*a hang-out for junior high kids*) What news does Rusty-James get while he's playing pool there? (*Biff Wilcox wants to kill him.*)
7. Do you think Rusty-James **feels** as cool as he tries to **act** about Biff?
8. What things do you find out about Steve in Chapter Two? (*He and Rusty-James are best friends, but Steve is cautious and studious.*)
9. What does Rusty-James mean when he says "He was my best friend. That was his rep" ? (*Steve has never done anything notable other than being friends with Rusty-James, who protects him from tougher boys.*)

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10. Have gang fights been common lately in Steve and Rusty-James' neighborhood? (*not lately*) Could the planned fight between Biff and Rusty-James trigger a return of the gang fights?
  11. The mention of whom seems to make Rusty-James angry? (*the Motorcycle Boy*) Who is he? (*Rusty-James' older brother—see back cover.*) Why might Rusty-James be mad at him? (*As Steve tells him, the Motorcycle Boy may be gone for good.*)
  12. Does it seem odd to you that Steve and Rusty-James are best friends? Do they seem to have much in common? Do you know of any friendships in which the same agreement seems to have been made, i.e., protection in exchange for homework?
  13. What animal does Rusty-James say Steve looks like? (*a rabbit*) How does he act like one as well? (*He is cautious, has never been in a fight and would probably prefer scampering away to confronting anyone.*)
  14. What does Rusty-James say his bad habit is? (*getting attached to people*)

### Prediction

Will Rusty-James win the fight with Biff? Will Steve get involved?

### Activities

#### Literary Technique: Flashback

*Rumble Fish* is an example of **flashback**. The first and last chapters take place in the present. The chapters in between relate the main action of the story, which takes place five years before in a different setting.

- What prompts Rusty-James to tell the story? (*seeing an old friend, Steve*)
- What do you find out in Chapter One that makes you ask why? (*Why was Rusty-James in a reformatory? Why does he have trouble remembering? How did he get the scars?*)

### Writing Ideas

- "Flash back" to five years ago. Describe yourself then. What kinds of activities did you enjoy? How did you look? Who was your best friend? Can you think of any incidents that happened back then that made a difference in your life now?
- Rusty-James cares a lot about acting "tough" and "cool." Is that a good way to get people's respect? Why or why not? List some other ways.

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## Chapters 4 and 5

### Vocabulary

weird 36	hood 37	vicious 38	mouthy 38
obnoxious 38	bribed 40	scrounging 41	simulated 42
mags 42	desperate 43	gap 43	ledge 44
toehold 44	keel over 47	hick 48	superelite 49
sassy 49	junkie 49		

### Vocabulary Activity

Have the students work in groups to write as few sentences as possible which, together, include all of the vocabulary words. They should not need to write more than three sentences. The sentences should make sense and be properly punctuated, but they can be a little bit on the silly side. For example, "The **weird, desperate junkie** and the **sassy, vicious hick** **bribed** the **obnoxious, mouthy hood** into helping them steal the **simulated mags** so they could go **scrounging** for drugs in the **superelite** part of town, but the hood was about to **keel over** from exhaustion so he declined."

### Discussion Questions

1. Rusty-James thinks Steve's parents are weird. Do you think it's weird for parents to object to their 14-year-old son sneaking out to get involved in a fight? What does this tell you about how Steve's parents may be different from Rusty-James' father?
2. Why was it so easy for B. J. and Smokey to win when they played poker with Rusty-James? (*They could tell by his expression whether he had a good or a poor hand.*)
3. What does coach Ryan offer Rusty-James? (*five dollars to beat up Don Price*) Do you think the coach was serious? Is this something that could really happen?
4. Why does Rusty-James like English? (*The teacher just reads them stories; if there's a test, Rusty-James copies someone's answers.*) Do you think Rusty-James belongs in the lower-level class? Is he there because of low ability or lack of effort—or some other reason? How do you think he feels being in the "dumb" classes?
5. Patty's mother doesn't like Rusty-James. What would you be worried about if you were Patty's mother? How does Rusty-James solve the problem? (*He only goes to Patty's when her mother isn't home.*)
6. Why is Steve so quiet? (*His mother is in the hospital.*) How does Rusty-James try to help? (*He tells Steve about the coach's offer, changing the amount to \$50, to try to distract Steve from his concern over his mother.*) What else might Rusty-James have done to help Steve?
7. What does Rusty-James' father do with the money he gets from the government? (*spends most of it on alcohol*) Does Rusty-James seem concerned or upset that his father obviously has a problem? (*No, he seems to accept his father's behavior and doesn't judge him; he also does not seem to respect him.*)