**Major Theme**

The novel deals with the needless pain and violence caused by gang rivalry. The entire book centres on the animosity that exists between the Socs, the rich kids from the west side of town, and the Greasers, the impoverished teenagers from the east side. Because the Socs think they are superior, they jump on the Greasers at every opportunity. Before the book actually begins, they have beaten up Johnny Cade, the meekest Greaser, for absolutely no reason. Then in the first chapter of the book, the Socs jump Pony, the main character, as he walks home from the movie theatre alone. Such needless violence leads directly to the death of Bob and indirectly to the deaths of Johnny and Dally.

When Pony, Johnny and Two-Bit befriend two Socy girls, Cherry and Marcia, there is some hope that with increased interaction between the two gangs, their hostility will decrease. In fact, Pony and Cherry find that they can talk easily with each other and have a lot in common, including their love for sunsets. But this friendship is not allowed to develop because the Socs resent their girls fraternizing with the Greasers. As a result, Bob and a few other Socs attack Pony and Johnny to teach them a lesson. During the fighting, Johnny kills Bob in self-defence. Pony and Johnny then hide in an abandoned church in Windrixville. They rise above themselves and heroically rescue some children from the burning church. During the rescue, Johnny is seriously wounded when a burning beam falls on his back; he is put in the hospital and is not expected to live.

In spite of the fact that Johnny is close to death and Dally is injured, the tension between the Socs and the Greasers increase. The Socs want to have a rumble to settle the score about Bob. In the fight that ensues, the Greasers are joined by the Shepard and Brumly gangs; they easily defeat the Socs. But the violence is still not ended. When Johnny dies, Dally goes crazy. He pounds the wall, rushes out of the hospital, robs a store, and points his unloaded gun at the police. As a result, he is shot and killed while his friend watches in horror. Pony is so upset by the violence and the loss of another friend that he is delirious for more than three days. Fortunately, Johnny’s letter, written before his death, makes an impact on Pony, and he vows to rise about his life of gangs and violence and promises to help other underprivileged children. Like Johnny, he has realized the pain and futility of gang rivalry.