

authors/illustrators

guide/catalog search

classroom clubs

web links

author & illustrator appearances

ordering info

mailing list sign up



S.E. Hinton

about this author

By the time she was 17 years old, Susan Eloise Hinton was a published author. While still in high school in her hometown--Tulsa, Oklahoma--Hinton put in words what she saw and felt growing up and called it *The Outsiders*, a now classic story of two sets of high school rivals, the Greasers and the Socs (for society kids). Because her hero was a Greaser and outsider, and her tale was one of gritty realism, Hinton launched a revolution in young adult literature.

Since her narrator was a boy, Hinton's publishers suggested that she publish under the name of S. E. Hinton; they feared their readers wouldn't respect a "macho" story written by a woman. Hinton says today, "I don't mind having two identities; in fact, I like keeping the writer part separate in some ways. And since my alter ego is clearly a 15-year-old boy, having an authorial self that doesn't suggest a gender is just fine with me."

Today, more than twenty-five years after its first publication, *The Outsiders* ranks as a classic, still widely read and one of the most important and taboo-breaking books in the field. Finally, someone was writing about the real concerns and emotions of a teenager. *The Outsiders* marked the beginning of a new kind of realism in books written for the young adult market, and Hinton's next four books followed suit.

She wrote her second book while she was in college at the University of Tulsa, studying to be a teacher. But "I don't have the nerve or physical stamina to teach," she says. "I did my student teaching, but I couldn't leave the kids and their problems behind me; I'd go home and worry about them. I think people who are good teachers do one of the most important jobs there is; I can't praise them highly enough."

David Inhofe, who is now her husband, was her boyfriend then and was instrumental in helping her get her second book written. Hinton was suffering from writer's block. Inhofe refused to go out with her at night unless she wrote two pages during the day, and slowly but steadily over four months, she compiled the manuscript that became *That Was Then, This is Now*, a story of drugs, delinquency, and a tough kid making a tough decision. She and David were married in 1970; the second book was published in 1971.

Her third book, *Rumble Fish*, was published in 1975. Hinton was inspired to write it by a magazine photo she had saved since 1967, of a boy on a motorcycle. *Tex* followed, and drew the attention of Walt Disney Studios. In 1982, Disney's movie version, starring Matt Dillon, was released. Dillon later starred in movies of *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*, and he and Hinton have become friends over the years. In 1985, Paramount Pictures released *That Was Then, This is Now* and Fox Television adapted *The Outsiders* for a television series.

Taming the Star Runner, Hinton's fifth book, was a departure for her. "For the first time, I told the story in the third person. My son, Nick, was then four, and I was so involved with him that I didn't have the emotional space to become a completely other person."

After *Taming the Star Runner*, Hinton took a seven-year break. She was busy with Nick, and she says, "I couldn't think of a single thing to say. I didn't have a writer's block--I was writing plenty: screenplays for my novels, television scripts, advertisements. I simply didn't have a story I wanted to tell."

When she found a story, it was directly from her life. *Big David, Little David* is a hilarious picture book about a joke she and her husband played on Nick when he was entering kindergarten. On his first day at school, little Nick meets a boy who, like Nick's father, has dark hair, glasses, and is named David. "He's not you, is he?" Nick asks his father.

"Oh, yes, that's me," Big David says. A rollicking tale of confused identity follows.

No more outsiders, no more tough boys, but *Big David, Little David* shares with all of Hinton's work a deeply autobiographical thread.

"*The Puppy Sister* is actually the most autobiographical of all of my books," she says. "Nick is an only child and was not an animal person. He was a little bit afraid of dogs, but I was determined to get him a puppy so he could connect and share attention in the family. We got our puppy when Nick was eight, and there was so much sibling rivalry between the two that he once accused me of loving the dog more than I loved him. 'Honey,' I told him, 'it's not true. I love you more: you're housebroken.' "

Hinton knew the story of puppy-boy rivalry was a good one, but she needed a hook. Nick provided it. One day the three of them came home from a walk and Nick said to his mother, "I wonder when she will turn into a person." And *The Puppy Sister* was born.

When Hinton's not writing, she rides her horse, takes courses at the university, and is involved in Nick's school. "I'm not any one thing, and that's a reason I don't mind having a separate identity for my writing. I'm an author, but I'm also a mother, a friend, a horseback rider, a decent cook. Being involved domestically keeps me in touch with reality."

S. E. Hinton is the recipient of the American Library Association's and *School Library Journal's* first annual Margaret A. Edwards Award, which honors authors whose "book or books, over a period of time, have been accepted by young people as an authentic voice that continues to illuminate their experiences and emotions, giving insight into their lives."

S. E. Hinton on Becoming a Writer

Q. *What made you decide to become a writer?*

I loved reading and I loved writing. I was really focused, and writing is easy for me because I never write unless I have something to say.

Q. *How do you begin to write your books?*

I always begin with a character in mind and an ending I want to get to. I like my characters to grow, to show some change. So I know that in the middle of the book I'll have to figure out how to make the change happen. The middle is the hardest part for me.

Q. *How did you get your first book published?*

I showed the manuscript of *The Outsiders* to a friend whose mother was an author. She liked it and gave it to a friend who was also a writer and who

had an agent. The agent liked it and sold it to the second publisher who read it. I'd never even heard of agents at 17, and I still have that first agent.

Q. What do you like to read that influences your writing?

As a kid, I loved animal stories, particularly horse stories. I was one of those little girls who felt like she was one with a horse. Today I read biographies a lot because they are about character, and character is what drives my novels. I also enjoy Jane Austen--character is her main concern--and I'm a history buff. I think if you want to learn to write better, you need to read better.

Q. Do you have any particular writing habits?

I don't really; I keep changing my methods, working around other things in my life. *That Was Then, This is Now* was written in the two-pages-a-day method. *Rumble Fish* was written on Thursday nights, because that was when my husband played poker. My fourth book, *Tex*, took me the longest to write. I plotted it for three and a half years. I wrote *Taming the Star Runner* on a schedule, because 3 days a week Nick was in preschool, and those were my writing days. I guess my one technique throughout is to be flexible about time and seize it when I can.

Q. Do you discuss your books as you write them, or does anyone read your work in progress?

No, not really. My husband's great. He'll say, "That's nice, honey," in a vague, non-interfering sort of way. And I did let Nick read *The Puppy Sister* when it was in manuscript, because he had so much to do with it. It's about him; he suggested the idea. I'm thinking about a new book now, but I don't like to talk about things until they're done. I'm afraid I'll wear out my idea.

Q. Do you have any advice for those who want to write?

If you want to be a writer, I have two pieces of advice. One is to be a reader. I think that's one of the most important parts of learning to write. The other piece of advice is: Just do it! Don't think about it, don't agonize, sit down and write."

Q. Any more advice for the budding writer?

Yes--do the best you possibly can. Write, write, write, and read, read, read!

author fun facts

Born

July 22, in Tulsa, Oklahoma

Education

BS University of Tulsa

Currently lives

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Previous jobs

As a teenager I worked in a bookstore and ran an elevator, but I started making a living writing fiction at a fairly young age.

Hobbies

Horseback riding (jumping and dressage), history, and paranormal studies

Inspiration for writing

I started to love writing in grade school, which was inspired by my love of reading. Sometimes that's the only thing that keeps you going, remembering that you really did love it (and mostly still do.)