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Character Analysis

Inside the Outsiders

"Only a life lived for others is worth living" said Albert Einstein, one of the great geniuses of the twentieth century. This is what Dally discovers during S.E. Hinton's novel, The Outsiders. Dally is a juvenile delinquent. He went to jail at age ten. As a teenager he rolls drunks, steals, and jumps small kids. Dally befriends Johnny. Johnny is timid, law abiding, and suicidal. Dally and Johnny have very similar experiences; they both grew up in poor families that don't care about them, but how they react to these experiences are very different. Dally's and Johnny's friendship is so strong that Dally only wants to live a life for Johnny. Dally's relationship with Johnny changes Dally from a tough, self-centered person into a caring, selfless person.

When the reader first meets Dally, he seems like nothing more than a dangerous hood. Most characters in the book think that he could never change and never open up to love someone. "It would be a miracle if Dally loved anything. The fight for self-preservation had hardened him beyond caring." (54) Dally's rough childhood on the streets of New York had made him hate the world. He was hardened, and he knew you don't survive by helping other people. But before long, this seemingly simple character with no room for development reveals another side to his nature.

Several things happen to Johnny over the course of The Outsiders that show Dally's other side. Johnny gets himself in a lot of trouble in the book. He kills a Soc and he gets stuck in a fire. Dally helps Johnny escape the town and rescues Johnny from the fire. Dally's selfless actions prove that he changes. His whole life becomes a struggle to protect his friendship.

By the end of the book, the reader knows Dally was a caring person who lost his will to live when his friend died. All the suffering his friend went through brought out a sensitive and even compassionate part of Dally. Even Dally going crazy when Johnny died is an altruistic act. "But I remembered Dally pulling Johnny through the window of the burning church; Dally giving us his gun, although it could mean jail for him; Dally risking his life for us trying to keep Johnny out of trouble" (134) Dally really loved Johnny. He hardened himself toward everyone, but he had a soft spot for Johnny. When Johnny died, it was like Dally lost a part of himself. His life was broken. Dally cared for Johnny so much because he sees in Johnny what he had lost. He had lost Johnny's golden sensitivity and bravery. And his relationship had been a way for Dally to protect these virtues.

Dally becomes a caring and selfless person, after being a tough self-centered person, because of his relationship with Johnny. Although Dally changed in character, he was a hood till the very end. Even if Dally hadn't died he would have been a tough hood all his life. He would die a reckless delinquent, not a hero. Dally was born on the wrong side of town. It's just too bad Dally never read Johnny's message of wisdom. If he had, maybe he wouldn't have lost hope in the world.

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