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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Rumble Fish

by S. E. Hinton

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Rumble Fish

Note to the Teacher

Rusty-James is a street-wise, tough kid who relies on his fighting ability rather than intelligence to get what he wants. His older brother, the Motorcycle Boy, is the toughest kid in the neighborhood, and Rusty-James hopes to be just like him some day. The Motorcycle Boy is calm in the face of chaos, relishes time alone, and keeps his emotions invisible to those around him. Rusty-James is the exact opposite of his brother. Whenever Rusty-James is in trouble, the Motorcycle Boy bails him out, until one day when the Motorcycle Boy isn't around to help his little brother. Rusty-James' life changes forever.

S.E. Hinton is the author of several novels, including *The Outsiders*, which she wrote when she was just sixteen. Her coming-of-age stories for young adults are frank and honest examinations of the issues surrounding adolescence. S. E. Hinton is the recipient of the American Library Association's Margaret Edwards Award.

Teachers should realize that *Rumble Fish* deals with topics such as gangs and gang fights, drug use, alcoholism, and domestic violence. The author presents the topics in a straightforward and realistic way, and in most instances, the violence is not glorified. In fact, the novel clearly demonstrates the repercussions of the characters' actions.

All references come from the Laurel Leaf edition of *Rumble Fish*, copyright 1989.

Rumble Fish

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the significance of the title *Rumble Fish*.
2. determine the setting of the novel.
3. compare and contrast Rusty-James' thoughts on courage with those of the Motorcycle Boy's.
4. discuss the significance of the river and its importance in the novel.
5. identify the recurring themes in the story.
6. cite examples that support the idea that Rusty-James is just like the Motorcycle Boy; cite examples that show how they are completely different.
7. discuss the author's use of irony in the novel. Cite examples and explain how irony contributes to the story.
8. develop parallels between the issues faced by the characters in *Rumble Fish* and the issues faced by today's young people.
9. identify examples of descriptive imagery and relate their importance to the story
10. discuss the ways parents are portrayed in the novel. Contrast the effects each has had on their children.
11. discuss the climax of the story and its importance on Rusty-James' life.
12. explain how *Rumble Fish* is a coming-of-age story.
13. develop an opinion on whether Rusty James is merely a product of his environment or is responsible for his own actions
14. compare and contrast Steve's and Rusty-James' views on courage, leadership, moral responsibility, and authority.
15. discuss what the Motorcycle Boy's trip to California represents.
16. discuss how the story might be different if the point of view were different.

Rumble Fish

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Explain how the use of foreshadowing in *Rumble Fish* builds interest for the reader.
2. Write a half page description of the major characters in *Rumble Fish*.
3. Use examples to discuss the mood of the novel and the impact it makes on the reader.
4. Prove that the following themes are in the novel:
 - A. The destructive effects of stereotyping people and/or groups.
 - B. The importance of family and friends in one's life.
 - C. The conflict that arises when loyalty to a friend clashes with a sense of moral duty.
 - D. The consequences of irrational decisions and behavior.
 - E. The difficulty of following one's conscience.
5. Create a two-page sequel to *Rumble Fish* discussing what you expect will happen to Rusty-James over the next five years.
6. Choose one character from *Rumble Fish* and discuss how he or she fits a particular stereotype.
7. Define first person and third person point of view and explain the advantages and disadvantages of each. Identify the point of view and the narrator in *Rumble Fish*.
8. Define and cite examples in the text for the following literary terms:
 - A. allusion
 - B. flashback
 - C. sarcasm
 - D. simile
 - E. tone
9. Identify the following plot incidents:
 - A. exposition
 - B. rising action
 - C. climax
 - D. falling action
 - E. resolution
10. Determine the setting of *Rumble Fish* and cite examples from the text to support your answer.

Rumble Fish

Chapter One

VOCABULARY

reformatory – a school for juveniles with disciplinary problems
solitary – a form of punishment where the subject is isolated

1. How do Rusty-James and Steve react when they meet? How long has it been since they last met?

2. Compare the professions and lifestyles of Steve and Rusty-James.

3. Rusty-James and Steve discuss what they have done since they last met. During their conversation, what information is revealed that portrays Rusty-James as a troublemaker?

4. Why is Rusty-James not happy to see Steve?

Chapter Three

VOCABULARY

maniac – crazed person
black cherry pop – Black cherry soda

1. Why does Rusty-James visit Patty mostly at night?

2. When Rusty-James enters Patty’s house, she is angry with him. What does Patty do when she is mad about something?

3. Why does Patty get upset with Rusty-James when he is leaving her house?

4. While they are arguing, Rusty-James and Patty begin throwing accusations at each other. In order to defend himself, what does Rusty-James accuse Patty of doing? What does this information reveal about Patty’s character?

Chapter Seven

VOCABULARY

doggedly – repetitively and continually

- 1. Steve meets Rusty-James and the Motorcycle Boy to go downtown, and Rusty-James notices that Steve is acting peculiar. What does Rusty-James notice about Steve’s recent behavior?

- 2. Why does the Motorcycle Boy not like to drink?

- 3. What is the Motorcycle Boy’s level of colorblindness?

- 4. How do Rusty-James and Steve get into a movie for people eighteen and older?
