

*The Outsiders* Role Drama

*The Outsiders* Role Drama, English Literature: Grade 8

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## **1. Entry Point**

This role drama has its origins in a discomfiting experience that occurred during my practicum, when I was teaching S.E. Hinton's novel *The Outsiders* to an eighth grade humanities class. Written by S.E. Hinton when she was only seventeen years old and set in 1964 Tulsa, Oklahoma, *The Outsiders* follows the story of Ponyboy Curtis and his orphaned brothers and their friends, who are economically disadvantaged Greasers; and the explosive events that occur between them and a rival gang of upper middle class Socs. I had anticipated the novel study for several months and had even discussed it in my inquiry project in the fall term. My inquiry had focused on "How we discuss socio-economic class in the classroom" and considered, in part, the economic composition of my practicum school in East Vancouver; for instance, there is a \$90 000 difference between the maximum income and minimum income of the school's households. When I wrote my inquiry in December, these figures, while distressing, were numbers on a page. In April, these numbers were now irrevocably linked with students. I knew Grade 11 students who drove BMWs to school, while others worked three part-time jobs to help pay rent. In my Grade 8 class, I knew some students owned cottages in the Gulf Islands, while others shared two bedroom apartments with five family members. As we studied *The Outsiders*, I tried to cultivate empathy for Ponyboy, his family, and friends; and encouraged students to understand how both the Greasers and the Socs are limited by their circumstances. I was therefore dispirited when one a student asked why Ponyboy and his brothers spent money on alcohol, cigarettes, and cake if they were poor—couldn't their resources be put to better use? This student had a valid concern, so we spent some time considering the economic details of the Curtis clan—their jobs, their education, and the hope Ponyboy represented. I was frustrated, however, when this student was joined by others in her condemnation of the choices the Greasers made; my frustration was compounded because I knew these students to be from affluent homes. It pained me further to realize that not two seats away, her classmate struggled to complete homework assignments because his home had neither reliable power nor internet. How could I cultivate empathy in the more affluent students and promote advocacy against inequity? How could I avoid cultivating deficit models in my classroom? The exchange troubles me still and I developed this role drama partly in the hopes of cultivating empathy for the characters and their circumstances, both Greasers and Socs?

## **2. Rationale and Objectives**

The curriculum objectives for this role drama are based on the PLOs for eighth grade language arts. While this role drama achieves a range of objectives, I have chosen to focus on the following:

- Interact in pairs and in groups to support the learning of self and others, understand the perspective of others, and create a variety of texts (A1)
- Select and use a range of strategies to express ideas in oral communication (A3)
- Speak and listen to make personal responses to texts (A8)
- During reading, select a variety of strategies to anticipate content and construct meaning (B5)
- Write effective imaginative texts to explore ideas and information (C3)

The drama strategies used in this role drama help meet these curricular objectives in several key ways. First, the majority of this role drama is based on group interaction, requiring students to listen and respond to each other and to build on the perspective of others (tableau, meetings). Second, the drama requires student to create a variety of texts, both oral (gossip mill, improvisation, tapping in), visual (tableau, gesture, wanted poster), and written (wanted poster, advice letter). This textual variety also encompasses personal responses both to the novel and to the situations generated by the role drama, which becomes a text itself. Next, the role drama allows students to construct meaning based on the reading they have been doing—by imaginatively entering the world of *The Outsiders*, students recall plot, make inferences about character, motivation, and think critically about the challenges the characters face and anticipate content. Finally, students by creating Wanted poster and writing advice letters in role, students respond empathically to the challenges faced by the novel's characters.

### 3. Drama Glossary

**Carousel** Students use a rotating sequence to share a performance, mime, or tableau; there is no interruption between presenting groups.

**Character Walk** Students move through the space while portraying a character and in response to teacher prompts. Teacher may call out settings, character, motives, and circumstances, and students mime moving through these situations.

**Decision Alley** Students face each other in two lines and one student in role as the character who must make a decision, walks between the lines, hearing advice from each side. If time allows, each student may take a turn walking down the alley.

**Gesture** Physical movement used to reveal character.

**Gossip Mill** Students are asked to think of a cause of or to supply information about a given event and then circulate throughout the room and share their information with others. The teacher can either signal students to stop and share gossip and then begin milling about again, or can rely on participants to circulate and share.

**Improvisation** Most of all of what is being performed is created in the moment and is not scripted.

**Meeting** Involves both teacher and students in role in order to discuss a problem. The teacher facilitates the meeting but does not provide the solution; students assume roles as stakeholders in the process.

**Move through the space:** In silence and without touching each other, participants walk through the space following the teacher's instructions. Teacher can

vary pace (from 0- 10, with 0 representing standing still, 5 representing normal speed, 10 representing very fast), direction (forward, sideways) and method (curvy, in a circle, zigzag) of walking. Students freeze immediately when teacher says 'stop.

**Moving through a created world:** Students walk through the space and imagine the various locations or sensory circumstances the teacher identifies (smells, touch, sound, etc).

**Narration** One or more participants (in this case, the teacher either in or out of role), provides information or tells of events not experienced by the remaining participants. Narration can be used to connect activities while maintaining coherence.

**Tableau** Participants use their bodies to create a still image of a person, event, or concept. Tableau should contain levels (low/medium/high) and may also be expanded to show what happened before/after the tableau.

**Tapping in** While participants are frozen in a **tableau**, the facilitator places a hand on each participant's shoulder and asks the participant to respond to a question, or voice a feeling or point of view. Not all members of a tableau need to be tapped in, nor do all those who are tapped in need to respond.

**Teacher in role** The teacher assumes a role inside the drama in order to participate in, facilitate, and guide the story, while being responsive to the suggestions of participants.

**Visualisation** Uses second person narration and sensory detail to invite students to imaginatively experience the situation being described.

**Writing in role** Purposeful writing, in which the role drama provides the context for reflective writing. Writing in role allows for reflection on the experience from a position inside the drama.

#### 4. Outline of the Role Drama

##### A. *The Outsiders Role Drama Flow Chart: Scenes and Drama Strategies*

<b>SCENE 1</b>	1964, Tulsa Oklahoma (Walking in the Space, Visualisation)
<b>SCENE 2</b>	Names, Characters, & Families (Character Walk, Gesture)
<b>SCENE 3</b>	Family Photo: Ideal (Tableaux, Teacher in Role)
<b>SCENE 4</b>	Family Photo: Real (Tableaux, Teacher in Role)
<b>SCENE 5</b>	Death of Bob/ Johnny and Pony Escape (Gossip Mill)
<b>SCENE 6</b>	Gathering of the Socs (Meeting, Improvisation)
<b>SCENE 7</b>	Gathering of the Greasers (Meeting, Improvisation)
<b>SCENE 8</b>	Advice Letter (Writing in Role)
<b>SCENE 9</b>	What Next? (Tableaux, Tapping In, Carousel)

## Props Required

- Images from the 1960s, including pictures of Elvis, The Beatles, Neon Signs, a Hershey Bar
- Small pieces of paper divided among six different colours, enough for one piece per student
- Images from *The Outsiders* such as madras shirts, a red Corvette, a blue Mustang, and so on
- Music from the period
- Template for Wanted Poster (see Appendix)
- A scarf or beret for teacher in role as photographer

## Scene One: 1964, Tulsa Oklahoma

Before students arrive, prepare the room by moving chairs and desks to the side. Place small coloured squares of paper around the room, one for each student; there should be approximately six colours and roughly an equal number of each colour. Distribute images from the 1960s around the periphery of the room. You may choose to play a song from 1964 as students arrive, perhaps “Dancing in the Street” by Martha and the Vandellas.

Once students have arrived, ask them to **walk in the space** as the music plays in the background. Continue for the length of the song, having students stop and change direction once or twice, and vary pacing. Once the song is finished, ask students to stay where they are and welcome them to Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1964—the city where *The Outsiders* is set. Ask students to close their eyes and **visualize** what you will be describing. If you wish, you may play “The Girl from Ipanema” quietly in the background while you read the following:

“The year is 1964. This year, for the first time, a plane flew all the way across Canada. The Toronto Leafs and the Montreal Canadiens are winning most of the Stanley Cups. Lester B. Pearson is Prime Minister, and in 1965 the red and white maple leaf becomes Canada’s national flag.

In the United States of America, President Lyndon Johnson has announced a War On Poverty. Elvis is the King of Rock ‘n Roll; the Beatles have their first string of number one hits; The Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan are gaining in popularity; and a young boxer named Cassius Clay, later Mohammed Ali, just won the world championship.

Tulsa, Oklahoma, is located on the Arkansas River. In 1964, Tulsa is known as both the “oil capital of the world” and “the most beautiful city in the world.” Walking through downtown Tulsa at night, it is easy to see why. What you notice most of all are the neon lights—up and down every street, neon signs announce businesses. A bowling pin for the bowling alley. A knife and fork for the diner. The whole town is lit up.

Like most towns, Tulsa has movie theatres and a few drive-ins—The Way Out, Rusty’s, The Dingo, and Jay’s. A ticket to the movies costs \$1.25 and if you want to eat a hot dog and a Coke it costs you 49 cents; if you feel like chocolate instead, a Hershey bar is 5 cents. A job can help you afford these things—minimum wage, say, for working at the gas station, is \$1.40 per hour. A new car costs about \$3 000 and a house around \$10 000. Average monthly rent is about \$100. Like most towns, Tulsa has wealthy sections and sections where people struggle to make ends meet; the wealthy live on the west side, the less affluent on the east side.

For babies born in 1964, the most popular names for boys are Michael, John, David, and James; for girls, Lisa, Susan, Karen, and Linda.

Now, it's Saturday afternoon in Tulsa. The grass is green, the streets are clean, and the sun is shining. Like most people, you are out and about—maybe you are shopping, or meeting friends, or at work."

Guide students to open their eyes. If you wish, "Downtown" by Petula Clark can be playing in the background.

### **Scene Two: Names, Characters, and Families**

Ask students to resume **walking in the space** at around a speed of five, and as they walk to choose a name and a character for themselves. Guide students in discovering their character. How do you hold your head? Are you shy? Are you outgoing? Once students have had some time to explore their character's movement, ask students to stop.

Next, ask students to think of a **gesture** that would characterize their character. Will your character iron clothes? Dig a ditch? Read a book? Give students a moment or two to think of and rehearse their gesture, then inform students that as a town they will all do their gestures for a count of four—by the time you have reached two, students should be half way through their gesture. Model this for them, then give students a few times of guided practice; if you wish, you can vary the speed with which students perform the gesture—a six count, for instance, to slow the gesture down; or a two count to speed it up. Once students have rehearsed their gesture, ask them to resume the walking about the space, using the walk they have created for their character. This time, ask students to introduce themselves to each other, using their character's name and gesture.

After allowing a few moments for greetings to be made, ask students to stop and each pick up a piece of coloured paper nearest to them. Explain to students that these coloured pieces of paper represent their families; instruct students to find characters with similar coloured pieces of paper and to group themselves into families. Once they have assembled into families, ask students to introduce themselves to each other, to show each other their gestures, and to determine their relationships to each other; remind students that with this new family structure, some of them might want to change character.

### **Scene Three: Family Photo—Ideal**

Enter the middle of the space in role as the photographer (you can perhaps don a scarf or beret to signal that you are in role). Excitedly proclaim that you are going to take a picture of all the families in Tulsa for your new book; this is their chance to show the nation that Tulsa really is the best city and to show off its citizenry to the best advantage. Tell the students you will give them a few moments to choose a pose for the picture and to remember that you are looking for traditional family portrait poses—no silliness! Give students a few moments to assemble their **tableaux** and then have all the families display their tableaux; circulate among them. Once students have briefly held their tableaux for about ten seconds, angrily call a stop to the pose. Tell students while you like the poses you have seen, you also heard a lot of fighting as families organized their poses. Tell them that his fighting has caused you to reconsider the direction of your project to include more candid shots.

### **Scene Four: Family Photo—Real**

Continuing in role as the photographer, tell students you now want to create two photographs: the 'ideal' photograph will show the family posing for the camera in the tableau they had just created; the 'real' photograph will show the argument that happened just before the ideal pose was created. Students display their tableaux as you, in role as the photographer, move from group to group, observing but not evaluating.

### **Scene Five: Death of Bob/Johnny and Pony Flee**

In role as the photographer, set the scenario for students to engage in **Gossip Mill**. Announce to the families that while you have been reviewing their poses, your assistant entered and gave some distressing news: one of the town's teenagers, Bob, has been killed by Johnny Cade during a fight, and Johnny and his friend Ponyboy Curtis (yes, that is his real name!) have fled. Tell students that you are too distressed to continue the work and must find out more details—all you know at the moment is that Bob was a 'Soc' from the wealthy west side and Johnny was a 'Greasers' from the poor east side. Suggest that the students should talk to their neighbours and to try to find out additional information. What happened? How did Bob die? What was the fight about? Tell students to take a moment to think of one piece of information that they might know that could shed light on the circumstances and that they could share with their neighbours. In role, encourage families to leave their homes and begin milling about the town, seeking and sharing information. At this point and depending on the class, you can either remain in role and join in the **Gossip Mill** or step out of role and guide the activity. Regardless of approach, by the end of this activity, change role to transition to the next section.

### **Scene Six: Gathering of the Socs**

As the **Gossip Mill** winds down, shift roles from the photographer to James, a Soc parent and friend to Bob's parents, doffing any props you have assumed as the photographer. Ask students to arrange chairs in two or three long rows, or in a horseshoe pattern; assume a seat at the front and facilitate the **meeting**. As students begin to sit down, gesture to an imaginary sidetable and invite them to help themselves to coffee or tea. Introduce yourself and welcome the students to your house; explain that you are good friends with Bob's parents, who are understandably too upset to attend this meeting, but you are glad to see many of Bob's friends and their parents here. Tell students you have called this meeting to find out the circumstances surrounding Bob's death—all you know is that the police mentioned Johnny Cade and his friend Ponyboy Curtis were responsible; you know these boys to be greasers. Can some of Bob's friends who are here tonight tell us more about them? What happened? How did Bob die? What were they doing associating with greasers?

Once students have clarified the circumstances surrounding Bob's death, move on to the dilemma. What should we do now? Johnny and Ponyboy have fled—is this a sign that they are guilty? How do we find them? What should their punishment be? Surely their friends know where they are? How can we convince them to talk to us or to the police? Guide students towards the suggestion of a reward for any information leading to the capture of Johnny and Ponyboy. Once students have reached this point, distribute "Wanted Poster" templates; in family groups, have students complete the posters, with one half of the class completing posters for Johnny and the other half completing posters for Ponyboy. Once the posters have been completed, suggest posting them around town; ask students to place the posters around the periphery of the room, mingling them amid other images from the 1960s. During this time, also have students return chairs to the

periphery of the room. As students distribute the Wanted posters, you may wish to play “Folsom Prison Blues” by Johnny Cash, or “Jailhouse Rock” by Elvis Presley.

### **Scene Seven: Meeting of the Greasers**

While students finish with the posters, transition to the role of Mack, one of the Greasers. In role as Mack, your disposition should be markedly different from that of James, so that your identity as a Greaser is evident. Also, unlike James, who is a parent, Mack is an adolescent, a peer of the boys involved. Invite the students to sit in the centre of the room; they will be surrounded by the wanted posters. Thank the Greasers for coming; explain that you had to meet in the park because no one’s house was big enough to hold everyone, but that they will have to be on the lookout for the police, who will be suspicious of such a large gathering of Greasers so soon after Bob’s death. Let students know that Darry and the gang wish they could be here, but they are laying low after what happened. Inform students that you are trying to determine what happened to Johnny and Ponyboy, where the boys have fled to, and how they can be helped. How did the fight start? Where have Ponyboy and Johnny gone? Did they have help? What will they do for money? How can we help them? Should they come back here? What will happen if they return? Will they go to jail? Will Ponyboy be able to stay with Darry and Soda if he returns or will he be sent into foster care? Do Johnny’s parents care that he is gone? Are the boys better off running away?

### **Scene Eight: Advice Letter**

Students should remember that Dally helped Ponyboy and Johnny escape; from this remembrance, and while still in role as Mack, tell students that Dally will be visiting the boys and has offered to take some letters to them. Suggest that students **in role as Greasers write letters to the boys**, advising them of possible courses of action now that they have fled.

### **Scene 9: What Next?**

Collect the students’ letters, briefly leave the room with them, and then return in agitation—announce that you have just met with Darry and that the boys have been found! Explain that they were hiding out in an old church; while they were away for the day, the church caught fire, trapping some school children. Johnny, Ponyboy, and Dally helped rescue the kids—they are all at the hospital now and are being called heroes. Step out of role at this point and tell students they are going to return to their families and create a **tableau** depicting their response to this news: how are they feeling? What will they do next? Tell students that their family can be Socs, Greasers, or neither; and that it is alright to have different opinions about what to do—this difference of opinion can be dramatized in the tableau. Give students time to prepare the tableau, circulating. Towards the end of the preparation time, tell students that as you view the tableaux, you will be **tapping in** on members in the scene; students should prepare to deliver one line that indicates their character’s thought in the tableau. The tableaux will be presented as a **carousel** and you will move from one group to the next, **tapping in**. Watch the carousel while observing, but not evaluating.

### **Debriefing**



Remain out of role and gather students to sit in a circle and initiate a debriefing discussion, allowing students to reflect on the role drama process. The following questions may be used to begin the conversation:

- Let's talk a bit about the final tableaux. How did groups decide on the tableaux ideas?
- Did what you experienced in the drama process influence your decisions for the final tableau?
- What parts of this process stand out for you?
- How did this role drama change or increase your understanding of the novel?

## **B. Sequencing**

This role drama is focused around three core drama activities—the improvisational meetings of the Socs and the Greasers, the writing of the advice letter in role, and the final tableaux depicting reactions to the actions of Dally, Ponyboy, and Johnny in the fire. The remaining activities in the role drama are designed to support and lead to these three core activities. The role drama begins with Walking in the Space, which allows students to become comfortable in the space and to focus on self-regulation in response to teacher instructions; further, Walking in the Space affirms to the students that the teacher is in control and that the space is safe. Walking in the Space is quickly followed by a guided visualization activity; the purpose of this activity is to begin to develop a believable scenario and to have students imaginatively locate themselves in 1964 Tulsa.

Once the visualization activity has been completed, students resume walking in the space, but this time they begin to develop character through posture, demeanour, and gesture. This strategy introduces new activities of risk—developing a character in the role drama, developing a gesture for that character, and sharing that character and gesture with others in the space—and locates them in the familiar activity of walking in the space, therefore reducing the perception of risk by the students and increasing their belief in the scenario. At this point, students are kinesthetically engaged, interacting with each other in role, and are developing belief in the scenario; this engagement and belief is further developed as students are separated into families.

Belief is further developed in the Family Photo activities, where the teacher enters enthusiastically in role, thus bringing the students more fully into the world of the story. Building on this enthusiasm, students choose to represent their ideal family and then reveal some tensions beneath it. Using tableau for this activity helps students increase their level of dramatic risk and explore their character, while simultaneously sharing that risk among the group and increasing engagement with the story. This scaffolding of risk in role continues in Gossip Mill, where students are asked to interact more fully with each other in character. Gossip Mill also introduces an element of improvisation into the drama as students verbally exchange information in role, but giving students time to prepare what information they will share scaffolds the improvisation so students feel comfortable progressing to this next level. Gossip Mill also introduces tension into the drama with the revelation of the death of Bob and the

flight of Ponyboy and Johnny. This tension, along with improvisation, becomes crucial to the core drama activities that will inform the remainder of the role drama.

The first core drama activity is the meetings of the Socs and the Greasers; this activity builds upon the scaffold created by previous strategies. To begin, the meeting activities are premised on the assumption of students fully believing in the scenario; this believability is built gradually through the activities up to this point, as students moved from thinking in role, to walking in role, to speaking in role. The meeting activity demands that student remain and improvise in role and respond to suggestions of others in the meeting—skills that were developed in low risk activities in a safe environment through the tableau and Gossip Mill. Further, the meetings further exploit the tension introduced in Gossip Mill and make more demands upon students, while continuing to cultivate a safe environment as the teacher in role facilitates—an extension of the teacher facilitation in Walking in the Space that began the role drama. The decision to have the Socs and Greasers meet separately was a deliberate one: not only did I seek to cultivate empathy for the position of each group—an empathy I thought could best be cultivated if tensions were dealt with within rather than between groups—I felt that keeping the groups separate would enable a safer environment for students to explore dramatically because there would be less confrontation. The meeting of the Soc group concludes with the creation of “wanted posters”—the distribution of these posters creates assumes the quality of a ritual, slows down the pace, and allowing a somber transition to the Greaser meeting, wherein the boys depicted in these posters are the subject of affectionate concern.

The Greaser meeting concludes with the second core drama activity: writing in role. This activity builds upon the believability and, to some extent, the improvisation developed to this point; it also provides students with the opportunity to reflect on the tensions and perspectives developed thus far. Writing the advice letter also provides an opportunity for more taciturn students to engage in role in a safe environment.

The final core drama activity represents the culmination of the scaffolding that has occurred. The carousel tableau and tapping in not only develop the building drama activities, but also extend them in a slightly higher risk performance. In creating their final tableaux, students have the opportunity to dwell independently in the tension, believability, and role that have characterized the drama thus far. Further, in returning to their families, students have the opportunity to position themselves as Greasers or Socs, and hopefully make their decision in a fuller understanding of the challenges each group faced in the novel.

## **5. Variations and Extensions**

This role drama allows students to locate themselves imaginatively and subjectively in 1964 Tulsa, Oklahoma and in the world of *The Outsiders*. Several activities can extend this experience. After the students have been assigned their families, for example, groups could be given chart paper and markers or crayons and asked to design the town based on features from the novel—one family could draw the fountain, for example, while another could draw the gas station, and yet another the drive-in. Positioning these drawings in the centre of the room and encouraging the students to walk among them as the drama progresses will further transform the space

and encourage believability. Next, in lieu of writing advice letters to Johnny and Ponyboy, each student could choose one piece of advice to give the characters and this advice could be delivered in **Decision Alley**, with each student walking down the alley in turn; the role drama could end at this point, with students writing a reflection on the experience. Finally, while this role drama is designed to occur between Chapters Six and Seven of the novel—after the fire in the church, but before students know of Johnny’s death, of Ponyboy’s reaction to his friend’s death, and of what has happened in the rumble—the role drama could also take place after students have read the novel in its entirety. In this instance, the teacher in role as Mack could receive a report about the fire, Johnny’s death, and the rumble. The final tableau could be the representation of a town statue honouring Johnny’s heroism.

## **6. Assessment**

This role drama offers several opportunities for assessment, both formative and summative. Anecdotal observation throughout the drama can be used to determine students’ degree of engagement with the drama and their level of collaboration and participation with their group families. Next, observation can reveal student understanding of the novel’s plot and themes to this point and can highlight areas needing further emphasis during class time. Do students understand the tensions between Greasers and Socs? Is each group perceived sympathetically and are stereotypes avoided? Have students grasped the plot points surrounding Bob’s death and Ponyboy and Johnny’s flight? In addition to anecdotal observation, the drama provides the opportunity for summative assessment with the writing of the advice letter to Johnny. This letter allows teachers to assess the extent to which students have entered into role in their responses, their understanding of the tensions in the situation, and their empathy towards the characters.

Finally, in addition to assessing students, observation can reveal which parts of the drama are successful, and which parts need rethinking. Are their points in the process where believability falters? Does momentum lag at any point? Do students lose interest?

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Appendix

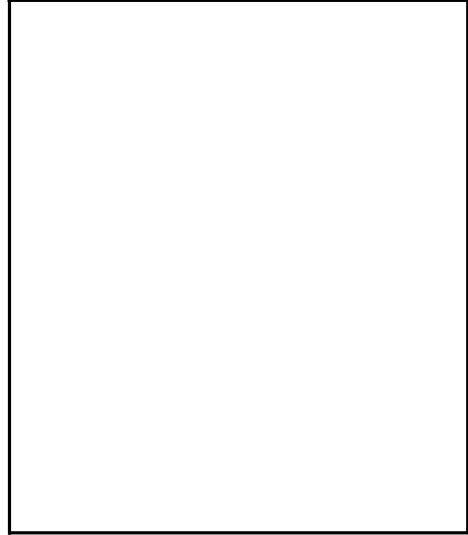
# WANTED

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

For Acts of \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Description: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Personality Traits: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_ Also known as (AK.A): \_\_\_\_\_

Specific acts include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Positive or negative consequences for these acts include: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Suspect last seen:

Favorite hangout(s)

