

Reading Guide to *Holes* by Louis Sachar

ABOUT THIS BOOK

In this funny yet poignant story, a boy embarks on a personal journey that changes his life, as he spends the summer paying for a crime he didn't commit.

Stanley Yelnats, falsely arrested for stealing a pair of sneakers, is sentenced to serve time at Camp Green Lake, a juvenile detention facility in the middle of a Texas desert. Having never attended summer camp, Stanley naively believes this to be a new opportunity. He is soon faced with a group of unhappy, unaccepting campers (inmates) and an evil warden who uses the boys to dig holes in search of buried treasure.

As the summer progresses, Stanley makes some startling discoveries about himself, the true meaning of friendship, and the ancient curse that has haunted his family for generations. In a parallel story about Stanley's "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather," the mystery of the curse is unveiled and Stanley, in his efforts to help a friend, suddenly finds himself in control of his own destiny and the fate of his unlucky family.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Louis Sachar was born March 20, 1954, in East Meadow, New York. His father worked on the 78th floor of the Empire State Building. When he was nine, his family moved to Tustin, California.

Louis went to college at the University of California, as Berkeley. During his last year there, he helped out at an elementary school – Hillside School. It was his experience there that led to his first book, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*, which he wrote in 1976.

He attended Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco and graduated in 1980. He worked part-time as a lawyer for eight years as he continued to write children's books.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways is the saying "You can't judge a book by its cover" a good one for this story? For example, what do you expect Camp Green Lake to be like based on its name? What is it really like?

2. What do you think the title *Holes* means? What might be another reason other than the holes the boys dig in the lake? What hole (or holes) is in Stanley's life when he first arrives at Camp Green Lake?

Are the holes still there when he leaves?

3. Stanley's father, an inventor, says, "I learn from failure." What do you think this means? In what ways have you learned from failure?

4. Why do the boys call Mr. Pendanski "Mom"? How does this name fit his personality? In what ways is it not a good name for him?

5. What do the boys' nicknames tell about each of their personalities? Do you think a name changes the way others see a person and the way the person sees him- or herself?

6. Why do you think Stanley lies to his parents in his letters home? Would you do the same?

7. Stanley and his family half-jokingly blame their misfortunes on Stanley's "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great grandfather." Do you believe in fate — that people are lucky or unlucky — or do you believe, as Mr. Pendanski tells the boys, that we are all responsible for our selves and our destinies?

8. As Stanley becomes stronger and his skin becomes tougher from digging the holes, how is he changing inside? What are the causes of those changes?

9. Why do you think Stanley gives X-Ray the lipstick tube? What would you have done if you were in Stanley's place?

10. Why do you think Stanley lies and says he stole Mr. Sir's sunflower seeds? If you were in Stanley's position, what would you have done?

11. At home, Stanley did not have friends. But at Camp Green Lake, he forms a special friendship with Zero. How did Zero and Stanley prove their friendship to each other? In what way does Zero fill a hole in Stanley's life?

12. How is Stanley's friendship with Zero similar to Kate Barlow's friendship with Sam? In each case why don't people approve of the friendship?

13. Why don't the other boys like Stanley and Zero's agreement that Zero will help Stanley dig and Stanley will help Zero read? Do you think it is fair to both Stanley and Zero? Do you think it is fair to the other campers?

14. *Holes* is really three stories tied together. One is about Camp Green Lake. The second is the tale of Stanley's great-great grandfather and the "curse" put on him by Madame Zeroni. The third story is of Kissin' Kate Barlow - the outlaw

who robbed his great grandfather. How do these three stories fit together within the larger story of Holes?

15. Stanley always seems to find humor even in the worst situations. He laughs on the bus to Camp Green Lake thinking about his "no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather." While walking across the hot, dry lake, he laughs at the sight of the boat, Mary Lou. Climbing Big Thumb, he even makes Zero laugh. What does this say about Stanley? How does his attitude help him?

16. What is the significance of Stanley's name being a palindrome - a word that is spelled the same way forward and backward?

17. Where does Stanley find the strength to carry Zero up the mountain? Why did he do it even though he didn't know what he'd find at the top? Describe something you've done that at first seemed impossible. What did you learn from the experience?

18. Even though his fate is uncertain, Stanley is suddenly very happy as he lies awake on the top of the mountain, staring at the stars. Why does he feel this way? How has his life changed from the start of the story?

19. Why do you think Stanley starts to call Zero by his real name, Hector?

20. When Hattie Parker sees Katherine and Sam kiss, she says, "God will punish you!" Based on the events later in the book, whom do you think God punished?