

Holes by Louis Sachar

Summary

Stanley Yelnats's family has a history of bad luck, so he isn't too surprised when a miscarriage of justice sends him to a boys' juvenile detention center, Camp Green Lake. There is no lake -it has been dry for over a hundred years - and it's hardly a camp. As punishment, the boys must each dig a hole a day, five feet deep, five feet across, in the hard earth of the dried-up lake bed. The warden claims that this pointless labor builds character, but she is really using the boys to dig for loot buried by the Wild West outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow. The story of Kissin' Kate, and of a curse put on Stanley's great-great-grandfather by a one-legged Gypsy, weaves a puzzle that tangles and untangles, until it becomes clear that the hand of fate has been at work in the lives of the characters - and their forebears - for generations.

Book talk

Stanley Yelnat's trouble began when he stole Clyde "Sweet Feet" Livingston's tennis shoes. Well, he didn't really steal them and his troubles actually went back much further to his no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather, but none of that mattered now that he was stuck at Camp Green Lake, a juvenile detention center that was really a dried up lake in Texas without even a trace of green. What the camp did have was rattlesnakes, deadly yellow-spotted lizards, and inmates with names like Armpit, X-Ray, and Zero, and a warden who was way beyond nasty.

The next 18 months for Stanley Yelnats were not going to be fun. Every day Stanley and the other inmates each had to dig a hole in the lake 5 feet deep and 5 feet wide. The only relief came if you dug up something that interested the warden. If this happened, then you might get to take the rest of the day off. Two weeks into his sentence, Stanley did discover something and the warden was interested, but Stanley never got the rest of the day off. [What did Stanley find and how did he survive those long hot days at Camp Green Lake?] Read *Holes* to find out why.

Discussion questions

1. Why is the book called Holes?
2. Besides the boys, who else dug holes at Green Lake?
3. How does digging holes help Zero and Stanley survive?
4. Was there a hole in Stanley's life when he went to Camp Green Lake? Was it still there when he left? Why or why not?
5. What "holes" are there in the story for the reader? How are they "filled in"?
6. Besides the title, the characters' names are also symbolic. Discuss the importance of names in the book. What is the significance of Stanley's name being a palindrome? Talk about the names in the book, particularly the nicknames given to the boys at Camp Green Lake.
7. There are many parallels between the different stories told in Holes. Explain the importance of these recurring themes: peaches, onions, and lizards, and Mary Lou.
8. Compare the song that appears throughout the book with the version that ends the book. How does the tone and meaning change? How does that reflect the changes that occurred in the book?
9. Find examples of irony and dark humor in the book.
10. At the heart of this story is a fable. Discuss the moral of this fable.
11. Who are the important characters? What does each character represent?