

Holes

by Louis Sachar

Unjustly accused of stealing a pair of sneakers, Stanley Yelnats is sent to Camp Green Lake, where he is made to dig holes all day with a group of other boys under the brutal command of two so-called “camp counselors” and a sadistic woman warden. Before long Stanley suspects that the digging has a purpose other than mere punishment.

THEMES

prejudice, perseverance, secrets, problem-solving, friendship, destiny

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. These terms should be defined and discussed:

perseverance, desolate, destiny, humiliating, despicable, souvenir, deflective, forlorn, grimaced, predatory, excavated, paranoid, evict, callused, penetrating, toxic, recede, writhe, agony, defiance, spewed, grotesque, parched, drought, humid, drenched, delirious, jut, random, tangy, frail, increments, precipice, contritely, feebly, murky, inexplicable, adjacent, precarious, wedge, scurried, initiate, rigid, hallucinations, hysterical, jurisdiction, pursuant, incarcerated, tedious

B. Consider the following questions:

1. Have you ever been falsely accused of doing something? How did it feel? What did you do about it?
2. What do you know about your ancestors? What country did they come from? Is there anything special about them you've been told?
3. Have you ever been in a desert? What was it like?
4. Have you ever pretended to search for buried treasure? How did you go about finding it? What real buried treasure might there be?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with Chapters 1 - 17: Describe Camp Green Lake. When things go wrong in Stanley's family, who do they blame? What happened to the first Stanley Yelnats? What invention is Stanley's father working on? Why is Stanley arrested? What does Madame Zeroni tell Elya to do with the piglet? What is her final request? What does she threaten to do if Elya fails? Why does Elya break his promise to her? In what ways does Stanley change as he digs the holes each day? What does he begin to realize about the hole digging?
2. Advance to Chapters 18 - 34: How had Stanley's great-great-grandfather survived in the desert? What does Zero ask Stanley to teach him? Why does Stanley refuse at first? Why does he change his mind? Why does Charles get angry at Katherine Barlow? Why does Katherine Barlow enjoy having Sam

work at the school? What is wrong with their friendship? What happens to Sam? What happens to Katherine? What happens to the town of Green Lake? What is Zero's real name? What does Stanley see on the mountain in the flash of lightning?

3. Complete the story with Chapters 35 - 50: What has Zero been living on all this time? In what ways do Zero and Stanley help each other climb the mountain? How does Stanley feel about being there with Zero? What is the “one more hole” he wants Zero to dig? How does Zero prove the suitcase belongs to Stanley? How is Zero's release achieved? What has Stanley's father invented? What are some of the changes that come into the lives of the Yelnats family?

B. For Discussion:

1. Trace “holes” as a symbol, including the holes the boys dig, Zero saying, “When you spend your whole life living in a hole, the only way you can go is up,” holes in cyberspace, black holes, etc.
2. Find the coincidences in the story, such as Zero being the one who stole the shoes and the great-great-grandson of Madame Zeroni, the suitcase having Stanley's name on it, and Zero and Stanley surviving on onions. What do these add to the story?
3. *Holes* is a story within a story. How do the two stories complement each other? Why does the author bring in Sam and Kate's story where he does?
4. After Sam is killed and Kate Barlow captured, the question is asked: “You make the decision: Whom did God punish?” Answer this in terms of their story and of Stanley's story.

III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

A. Language Arts:

1. Have students read some American Tall Tales, such as Paul Bunyan, Pecos Bill, or John Henry and compare with *Holes*. In what ways is *Holes* a tall tale?
2. When Stanley is standing in the hole with the lizards, he notices everything about them. Have students go

outside and take a few moments to be absolutely quiet and observe. Then have them write what they saw, heard, smelled, and felt. Discuss the importance of taking time to notice things in the moment.

3. Have students develop lesson plans for teaching someone how to read.
4. Stanley's name is a palindrome. Have students find out what a palindrome is and memorize some famous ones. Have them write their own names backwards and learn to pronounce them.

B. Art and Music:

1. Have students find records, tapes, or CDs for background music to some of the scenes. The music from *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein might be appropriate for when the boys are in the wreck room. A folk song like, "I've Been Working on the Railroad" might fit the scene where they dig the holes.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. The holes in the lake bed could be the background, they could show the boys digging, the lizards, God's thumb, and the lake when it was filled with water.
3. Have students find music to fit the "If only" song and learn to sing it. They might make up some new verses.
4. Have students draw caricatures of the characters such as Mr. Sir, Mr. Pendanski, the Warden, Zero, X-Ray, Zigzag and the other boys at camp.
5. Have students see the film of *Holes* and compare it with the book and CD. Which scenes are included? Which left out? Which changed?

C. Social Studies:

1. Have students research famous outlaws of the old West. Discuss why these people became outlaws. Why do people like to read about them?
2. Have students learn about their ancestors. What country did they come from? What experiences did they have? Have them talk with their parents or grandparents and then write about what their family background means to them. They might make a family tree.
3. Have students find out about famous inventors, like Thomas Edison. How many times did they have to do

something, trying different ways, before the invention was successful? What would they say was the most important quality an inventor must possess?

4. Have students find out how the "thumbs up" gesture originated. What is the opposite of it?

D. Science and Math:

1. The temperature at Green Lake hovers around 95 degrees in the shade. Have students find out what happens to someone who stays too long in this kind of heat and makes suggestions about how they could keep cool.
2. Have students find out about the reptiles that live in the desert, like rattlesnakes, scorpions, and lizards. Why is the venom of these reptiles poisonous? What can be done for someone who is bitten?
3. Have students calculate how long it would take to dig a hole five feet deep and five feet wide. How far away would the person digging have to put the dirt to avoid moving it again?
4. Have students find out what causes mirages on the desert.
5. Have students research the healing powers of herbs like onions and garlic.

USING AUDIOBOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

When it comes to teaching today's students, sometimes books are just not enough. In an increasingly technological and information-savvy world, the ability to read will be critical to every child's success. The value of audiobooks as a learning tool in the education of children is widely recognized by experts. Audiobooks bring written text to life, adding an interactive quality that can ignite a child's imagination. They encourage reading by broadening vocabularies, stretching attention spans, and fostering critical-thinking skills. Listening to audiobooks in the classroom can effectively enrich the reading experience and aid your students in understanding and appreciating literature, history, theatre arts, and more!

Theme Related Reading and Listening:

Listening Library offers additional titles that explore similar themes and content areas. Use the information below to purchase book and CD kits from our extensive list of award-winning and popular titles to enhance the learning experience for students in every classroom or library.

Other titles students may enjoy:

- *Because of Winn Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo
- *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *Bunnicula* by James Howe
- *Frindle* by Andrew Clements
- *The Giver* by Lois Lowry
- *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen
- *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinnelli
- *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary
- *Shiloh* by Phyllis Naylor Reynolds

For a FREE school and library catalog of Listening Library's unabridged productions:

- Call TOLL FREE 1-800-733-3000
- FAX us at 1-800-940-7046
- email us at BOTCS@randomhouse.com
- visit our website at www.school.booksontape.com
- or write:

Books on Tape
1745 Broadway
New York, NY 10019