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Holes by Louis Sachar

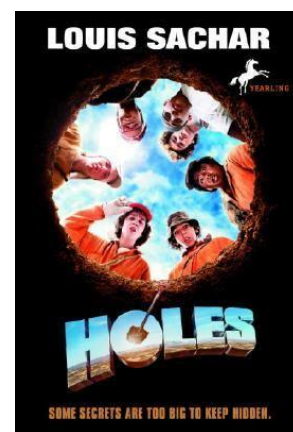
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SUMMARY

Stanley Yelnats is under a curse. A curse that began with his "no good dirty rotten pig stealing great-great-grandfather" and has since followed generations of Yelnats. Now Stanley has been unjustly sent to a boys' detention center, Camp Green Lake, where the warden makes the boys "build character" by spending all day, every day, digging holes: five feet wide and five feet deep. It doesn't take long for Stanley to realize there's more than character improvement going on at Camp Green Lake. The boys are digging holes because the warden is looking for something. Stanley tries to dig up the truth in this inventive and darkly humorous tale of crime and punishment--and redemption.



From KidsReads.com

<http://www.kidsreads.com/clubs/club-holes.asp> - accessed June 15, 2005



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louis Sachar was born in East Meadow, New York, moved to Southern California when he was nine, and now lives in Austin, Texas.

Louis's first book for children, *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* was accepted for publication during his first week of law school. Although Louis graduated and passed the bar exam, he opted to be a full-time writer for children rather than a lawyer.

Louis met his wife, Carla, when he was a visiting author at a school in Texas. She was a counselor at the same school. They have a daughter, Sherre. Louis likes to play chess, cards, ski, play the guitar (and sing loudly), but mostly he likes spending time with Carla and Sherre. Louis Sachar's popular books include *There's a boy in the girls' bathroom* and *Dogs don't tell jokes*.

From KidsReads.com

<http://www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-sachar-louis.asp> - accessed June 15, 2005



BOOK REVIEW

Holes, by Wayside School books author Louis Sachar, is a hilarious, frightening and clever novel that will shock and surprise you. It received the 1999 Newbery Medal, the Boston Globe Horn Book Award, and the 1998 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, so you know it's a winner.

Protagonist Stanley Yelnats has really bad luck --- after being falsely accused of stealing sneakers he is sent to a boy's juvenile detention center called Camp Green Lake. First of all, this is no camp, and second of all, there is NO lake --- nothing green has ever grown there. The work is the worst --- each day it is the same thing: dig a hole five feet by five feet, the length and depth of your shovel. Do not stop until you're finished. And do not even think about running away --- there's nothing around for miles, so you can't possibly escape.

One last rule --- do not upset the warden. She does really nasty things with snake venom when she's mad. She thinks that digging holes builds character --- at least that's what she says, but Stanley and the other boys have different ideas. Something fishy is going on at Camp Green Lake, and Stanley has to find out what it is.

You can't help but get sucked into this inventive and compelling novel --- it is at once extremely serious and outrageously funny. Sachar weaves a complex story that twists and turns as it becomes clear that fate has been at work in the lives of the characters all along. Let's just hope that fate is on Stanley's side!

From KidsReads.com

<http://www.kidsreads.com/reviews/0374332657.asp> - accessed June 15, 2005



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This book is really made up of two stories: Stanley's summer and the story of his great-great-grandfather in the Wild West. How does the author relate the stories and switch between them? What other stories do you know that can be broken up into several smaller tales?
2. Stanley begins the story overweight and unpopular at school. How does he change during the course of the book in order to fit in with a group? When he goes back to school in the fall, how do you think his classmates will view him?
3. Is Stanley a hero? How about his great-great-grandfather? What's the difference between a hero and just a good person?
4. Each camper at Camp Green Lake has a nickname. Discuss how the nicknames reflect on the boys' personalities; for example, why is Stanley called "Caveman"? How can a person's name change the way others see them and the way they see themselves?
5. When does Stanley begin to show courage? What brave things does he do? Discuss how courage can be very personal. An action that is courageous for one person might not be for another. What brave risks have you taken in your life that reminds you of Stanley's adventure?
6. Zero is Stanley's first true friend; discuss how their friendship develops. When Stanley finds out that Zero actually stole the sneakers, he isn't mad; actually, he's glad. Do you think this is an appropriate response? How would you respond if you and a friend were in a similar situation?
7. Was there a "hole" in Stanley's life before he went to Camp Green Lake? Was it still there when he left? Why or why not?
8. The Warden is a really nasty lady. What other evil women can you think of in books, movies, or fairy tales? How does the Warden compare to some of these witches and evil queens? How does the author create such a vile villain?

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AUTHOR INTERVIEW

I'm sitting in my office, which is located over the garage of my house in Austin, Texas. My dogs, Lucky and Tippy, are here with me. They are the only people allowed in my office when I'm writing,

"Lucky seems to understand that. He growls at my wife or my daughter if they try to enter. Maybe he senses me growling on the inside. I don't like being interrupted. Writing is a kind of self-hypnosis. Interruptions break the spell, and it's sometimes hard to get back.

"I generally write for about two hours a day, the first thing every morning. After two hours I find myself losing energy and concentration. It's best to quit while I'm still excited about the story. Then it will be easier to get started tomorrow.

"I couldn't write for a longer period, even if I wanted. Tippy has learned my schedule. After two hours, she taps me with her paw, barks, howls, and otherwise lets me know it's time for her walk.

"I never talk about a book until it is finished. It took me a year and a half to write *HOLES*, and I never told anyone anything about it during all that time. I do this for a variety of reasons, but mainly motivation. By not allowing myself to talk about it, the only way I can let it out, is to finish writing it.

"I write five or six drafts of each book. I start with a small idea, and it grows as I write. My ideas come to me while I'm write. The story changes greatly during the first few drafts. By the time a book is finished, it is impossible for me to say how I got the various ideas.

I was born March 20, 1954, in East Meadow, New York. My father worked on the 78th floor of the Empire State Building. When I was nine, we moved to Tustin, California.

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

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

"My wife's name is Carla. When I first met her, she was a counselor at an elementary school. She was the inspiration behind the counselor in *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*. We were married in 1985. Our daughter, Sherre, was born in 1987. She was four years old when I started writing the Marvin Redpost series. That's why Marvin has a four-year-old sister.

"In my spare time, I like to play bridge and tennis. I'm a much better bridge player than tennis player. The other evening, I played tennis with a teacher. She clobbered me. When I found out she was a fourth-grade teacher, I told her who I was. She was very impressed. She couldn't wait to tell her class she had killed Louis Sachar playing tennis!

"One thing I always want to know about my favorite authors is who their favorite authors are, so I will end with that. My list includes E.L. Doctorow, J.D. Salinger, Kurt Vonnegut, Kazuo Ishiguro, Flannery O'Connor, Rex Stout, Katherine Patterson, and E.B. White.

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If you like *Holes* by Louis Sachar,
You might like the following books, too!!

FRINDLE by Andrew Clements

WALK TWO MOONS by Sharon Creech

BUD, NOT BUDDY by Christopher Paul Curtis

BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE by Kate DiCamillo

JOEY PIGZA SWALLOWED THE KEY by Jack Gantos

WHEN ZACHARY CAME TO TOWN by Kimberly Willis Holt

EVERYTHING ON A WAFFLE by Polly Horvath

MISFITS by James Howe

VIEW FROM SATURDAY by E. L. Konigsburg

NO MORE DEAD DOGS by Gordon Korman

LONG WAY FROM CHICAGO by Richard Peck

FREAK THE MIGHTY by W. R. Philbrick

CRASH by Jerry Spinelli

MANIAC MAGEE by Jerry Spinelli

TRAPPED IN DEATH CAVE by Bill Wallace